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D I B D I N ' S

HISTORY

OF THE

S T A G E.

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A

COMPLETE HISTORY

OF THE

ENGLISH STAGE.

INTRODUCED by a comparative and comprehensive review of the ASIATIC, the GRECIAN, the ROMAN, the SPANISH, the ITALIAN, the PORTUGUESE, the GERMAN, the FRENCH, and OTHER THEATRES, and involving BIOGRAPHICAL TRACTS and ANECDOTES, *instructive and amusing*, concerning a prodigious number of AUTHORS, COMPOSERS, PAINTERS, ACTORS, SINGERS, and PATRONS of DRAMATIC PRODUCTIONS in all countries.

The whole written, with the assistance of interesting documents, collected in the course of five and thirty years, by

MR. DIBDIN, CHARLES

VOL. I.

LONDON:

PRINTED FOR THE AUTHOR,

AND SOLD BY HIM AT HIS WAREHOUSE, LEICESTER PLACE,
LEICESTER SQUARE.

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TO
THE MOST NOBLE
THE
MARQUIS OF SALISBURY.

MY LORD,

THERE is no task performed with such real devotion, or that can be so properly in place, as that which springs from private inclination, and is sanctioned by public duty.

That private inclination dictates this address; witness the gratitude with which your Lordship's unexampled liberality has indelibly impressed me, and which

is irresistably my perpetual theme; and your Lordship's situation as Lord Chamberlain of his Majesty's household, and Master of the Revels, evidently renders it a public duty in me, to address a book, which professes to record a History of the Stage, and such circumstances connected with it as relate to your Lordship's high office, to you, my Lord, and to you alone.

Having, however, been formerly honoured with dedicating a work to your Lordship, my difficulty in acquitting myself of this welcome duty would have been insurmountable, had not your Lordship waved ceremony and precedent by generously condescending to relieve me from this embarrassment.

I could long dwell, my Lord, upon this subject; long indulge my willing inclination with describing in how many ways my reputation has been advanced by

your Lordship's patronage and protection; but that the same feeling which impels me to be grateful forbids me to be importunate. Nobly to confer, is the most exalted exercise of the human mind. May you, my Lord, long live to enjoy that best of propensities, so congenial to the munificent, and in particular to your Lordship; and may every object of such benevolence be inspired with the pride, and the sensibility of obligation, which is truly felt, but cannot be adequately expressed, by

My Lord,

Your Lordship's

Truly honoured, obliged, and

Devoted Servant,

C. DIBDIN.

Leicester Place,

March 25, 1800.

PREFACE.

THIS work once collated and gathered into volumes, I had intended, as my original advertisement states, to have gone into it at length by way of preface, to have enumerated every particular that might be necessary for its illustration, to have given such reasons for every part of my own conduct as in that case would have been due to the public, and such answers to all those who have anonymously praised and censured me as might ensure my opinions the award of candour and impartiality.

When I made this rash promise, however, for rash it was beyond precedent, I was not aware that, to acquit myself of this almost impossible task, I must have added at least five volumes to those five I now publish, and all this, perhaps, to lead myself into scrapes with numerous individuals; a predicament, which it is neither my inclination nor my interest to risk. I shall therefore content myself with a few general remarks, letting praise or censure light upon the work, according as those may be inclined to indulge either propensity, who deliberately peruse it, without which degree of attention it cannot be read to any purpose; and, instead of shewing how readers ought to be pleased, explain in what manner I have endeavoured to please them.

The prodigious mass of materials perpetually at variance with one another, that I have had the slavery to wade through

precluded all possibility of a particular elucidation ; for they were a complete chaos of jarring atoms, out of which I defy any man to have formed a perfect historical world ; and, therefore, to have taken them otherwise than according to their general bearing, however it might have encouraged ingenuity, would not have favoured fidelity. Under this impression I have established judgment as the arbitrator between those two competitors, of which article I have certainly given up to the subject all that I possessed, which is as much as any reasonable reader can desire.

I might perhaps have exercised this necessary quality more deliberately, had not a number of circumstances intervened that it was impossible for me to have foreseen. I had no idea, when I began the History of the Stage, that I should take a circuit of between three and four thousand miles during the prosecution of it, and be in consequence obliged to dispatch copy written upon the spur of the moment to a printer, sometimes at four hundred miles distance, who, had he been paid to have involved me in every difficulty and inconvenience, could not more completely have discharged this retrograde office. I might, to be sure, have given it up at the end of the first volume, but this would have violated my respect due to the subscribers, and my regard to my own reputation ; and, as to foregoing every thing else upon this account, I appeal to the candid, for whom I have as grateful a deference as I have an ineffable contempt for cavillers, whether it would not have been a supererogate and absurd instance of quixotism, if, for the sake of watching the press, and of digesting historical matter into mere form, I had given up prospects which have confirmed my health, enlarged my connexions, and augmented my interest and my reputation, especially as by the experiment I should have lost the activity of truth, and gained nothing but its precision, in which parti-

cular, perhaps after all I have been virtually, as correct as my neighbours.

A mere history of theatrical events, I take to be a very insipid thing. I consider the Stage as a state branching from the empire of literature, and therefore an examination of its rulers, and the rise and operation of the various circumstances issuing from its general interest, cannot be related to effect without digesting different opinions and forming a rational judgment of them. In this, one is apt to be a little dictatorial, which, however, is a merit; for it implies that, after every necessary examination you have fully persuaded yourself that certain facts exist, and therefore you naturally expect an implicit acquiescence on the part of the reader, provided your general reasoning have made the matter clear. In this view, the historian may expect and ought to be credited; for, if every trivial fact were to be argued upon, the chain of narrative would be perpetually broken through, and nothing would be concluded.

It is upon this broad ground I wish this book to be judged. Indeed I think it ought to acknowledge no other authority; for I will venture to say that any thing written upon the conviction of long experience will be more likely in its essence to be faithfully authentic, than a history composed, or rather vamped, from a whole library of printed and written documents; especially when to my own knowledge many articles in even recent publications, relative to the theatre, are completely false.

It is no subject of wonder therefore, though heaven knows, I have had recourse to printed documents and written ones too, many of them, thanks to those busy gentlemen who seem to have had but little to do with their time, through the medium of

the penny post, that I have had more difficulty in avoiding fancied errors than in coming at evident truths; and here I cannot help reflecting on the egregious absurdity of those who have been so officiously friendly as to tender opinions which I could not but see, or else I must be fit for Bedlam, were traps for my veracity; and yet, poor devils, I forgive them. Indeed they are my friends without their own knowledge; for the anticipation of an injury is next to the enjoyment of a benefit. As to all those who from real kindness and friendly solicitude, have shewn an anxiety for my reputation in the course of this work, I should have to accuse myself of every thing unworthy and ungrateful if I did not feel their generosity and acknowledge the advantages derived from their advice; but of this they will be conscious, by an observation of the use I have made of their various remarks.

My great difficulty has been to curtail; for, from the large cargo of matter I have had the drudgery to consult, my task had been as troublesome as that of a manager in the shortening an overgrown play. I have therefore never teased the reader with dates of births, or deaths, or any times or actions, that I have conceived to be irrelative to the essence of the facts I have commemorated. I have also cut out second titles wherever I could; by the absence of all which extraneous matter I have been able to crib room for anecdotes and other articles which I conceived would be much more entertaining to the reader. Above all, I have as much as possible omitted Christian, or first names; a circumstance which may in some instances perhaps be taken in dudgeon, though certainly nothing can be a greater compliment. I remember, when Garrick was absurdly particular on this subject. A lady of distinction wrote her friend a minute account of the Jubilee, in the moment the little man returned home, with all his blushing honours thick

about him. In this account she frequently called him Garrick, without any prefatory appellation. He was told of it, and remarked, that it was a strange want of attention, for that it might at least have been Mr. Garrick. The lady heard of this, and wrote him a letter, professing to apologise for the omission, but yet full of close and keen irony. Among other things, she said, "that nothing could be farther from her intention than "the most distant idea of an impropriety. She only wrote while "her heart was full, at which moment she could no more have "said Mr. Garrick, than Mr. Shakespeare."

To enumerate the various objects this subject embraces would give this address more the form of a prospectus to recommend a work, than a preface to the work itself. The History of the Stage is now published, and let it stand or fall by its general merits. It may not, however, be irrelevant to notice that music has never been treated, as it relates to the Theatre, till now.

I shall finish this intrusion by intreating that I only desire to receive that proportion of commendation to which a fair construction of the above remarks may entitle me ; that the letter may be considered as comprized in the spirit of the work ; that inferior faults may be liberally overlooked ; in short, that I may find, as far as they are my due as to the literary part of this undertaking which rested with me, credit for good intention, industry, and discrimination, in the candour and consideration of my readers ; and for the typographical part, which did not rest with me, an errata in their generosity and indulgence.

ADVERTISEMENT.

IN addition to the source of materials whence I derive this work, which were before large, complicate, and redundant; I have been, and no doubt shall continue to be, favoured with much anonymous and other advice, manifestly the result of either curiosity, or malignity, or else kindness.

As I mean to do my duty faithfully, firmly, and honestly; I do not, of course, set out with an expectation of pleasing every body, a task which would reflect no great reputation on him who should accomplish it. As I hold myself, however, responsible for the validity of those motives which may induce me to broach my opinions; I shall, after I have gone through the whole body of evidence, sum up, in the nature of a charge to a jury, all those collateral points which may have governed my conduct throughout the whole of this undertaking.

To an address of this kind which I shall place at the head of this history, by way of preface, I refer all those who have appeared, in any respect, to be solicitous about me or my work, taking, till then, a privilege to myself to postpone any public notice of their favours.

This, declaration, however, has nothing to do with the warm and zealous exertions of those whose kindness and attention have so largely swelled my subscription. I beg, even at this early period, they will accept my most sincere acknowledgements, as an earnest of that notice of their friendship which I shall consider myself under an obligation to take when to the last number will be added the names of the subscribers, the preface I have alluded to, and a dedication, by permission, to that nobleman under whose generous auspices and unexampled liberality I have so often had the advantage and distinction of submitting my labours to the candour and indulgence of the public.

THE
STAGE.

BOOK I.

CONTAINING A REVIEW OF THE ASIATIC, THE GRE-
CIAN, THE ROMAN, THE SPANISH, THE ITALIAN,
THE PORTUGUESE, AND THE GERMAN THEATRES.

CHAP. I.

INTRODUCTION.

THREE questions suggest themselves on a con-
sideration of this undertaking:

Whether the subject it treats be of sufficient
moment, the characters it celebrates of sufficient im-
portance, and the events it relates of sufficient
authenticity to interest the public. To which may be
added, by way of a fourth proposition—Whether,
even should these points be incontrovertably made
out, it can create interest to such a degree as ef-
fentially to serve the purposes of truth and morality.

Of this field for enquiry, over which I mean to

go at large in my preface, I shall, at present content myself with taking a cursory review.

If of all the arts of imitation the most seducing, the most ingenious, the most expanded, and the most esteemed, that depicts nature by presenting man to man; and face to face; that teaches us to be friends, brothers, husbands, and fathers; that accelerates the progress of our ideas, perfects our reason and our sensibility, and induces us to blush at vice, and cherish virtue. If the stage exhibits this art, then is it of sufficient moment to interest the public.

The stage, to which denomination I shall beg to reduce all secular spectacles intended to inculcate morality, has maintained a commanding situation at all times, and in all countries. Of this religion has furnished us with many examples, mythology with more. Indeed, as mythology is no other than allegorical religion, so are the doctrines promulgated from the stage allegorical morality; to which priests have ever and wisely lent their countenance and protection. Altars have been more thronged through the winning medium of poetry, music, and dancing, than through the attraction of religious or moral duty. Out of fiction springs truth. It is in human nature to love entreaties rather than commands, and

that argument is the surest to prevail that awakens our pleasure while it conciliates our interest.

The most delightful fountain is the same by night as by day. Its waters are as pure, as clear, and as delicious; but, though necessity may, induce us to have recourse to it in the night, it is in the day alone that the draft is sweetened, through the medium of contemplation, by an idea of that heaven which it so beautifully reflects. So did man wander in a chaos of truth till the light of science taught him how to distinguish its beauty.

To the second proposition I shall answer, that if poets, warriors, philosophers, and legislators, if those who have united in themselves those various characters, if all the promoters and protectors of the imitative arts, whose exertions have so nobly contributed to civilize the world, together with those men so peculiarly gifted by nature, as to command the passions of their auditors, to compel bursts of laughter, force torrents of tears, and so to transfuse the workings of their own sensibility into their hearers as to raise pity, excite terror, and inspire delight. If the stage exhibits these characters, then is it of sufficient importance to interest the public.

'Tis little to say that the greatest men, both as to

power and talents, that ever lived, have countenanced the stage. The greatest men, in different countries, and in different times, have been not only authors and actors, but even dancers. Those great writers, *ÆSCHYLUS* and *SOPHOCLES*, were statesmen and warriors. They wrote for their country, and combated for it; and the same hand that, to serve the cause of morality, held the pen; in the cause of GREECE, held the sword. *The Seven Chiefs, before Thebes* of *ÆSCHYLUS*, was said to inspire his auditors with all the fury of battle, and they complimented him with saying, that though *ÆSCHYLUS* wrote the piece, it was dictated by *MARS*.

This work will adduce a multitude of proofs to make out these assertions. In the mean time let us consider for a moment the real worth and value of a dramatic writer. To be at all a writer, of any eminence, is a proud distinction; men of letters, the bent of whose genius is worthily conducted, who form the public taste, who expose the deformity of vice, and inculcate the true principles of virtue, merit from their fellow citizens the most honourable consideration; but a dramatic writer, he who puts speculative truth into action, who commands our richest faculties, who pervades the recesses of reason, who opens the treasures of the heart, excites its pity, and its commiseration, and

teaches us to be men, and to be virtuous; to acquire this art, is to attain the noblest privilege of human nature.

The dramatic art is the most precious inheritance bequeathed us by the ancients. A dramatic poet is an honour to his fellow creatures. Let us see why the profession of an actor should be involved in unmerited obloquy; and why a man, who delights and instructs us in his counterfeit character, should be an object of indiscriminate reproach in his real character.

It is extremely difficult to conceive upon what principle, or from what circumstance this unworthy prejudice took its rise. Is it that actors are men of stronger intellectual power and intelligence than the common herd of mankind? No. Individuals may be envious, the public are always generous. Is it that because actors are paid to amuse and instruct the world they ought to be considered as purchased slaves of the will? No. Barristers, parsons, and senators, are treated with respect.

What is the cause? That an actor is the main spring of the dramatic art it is impossible to deny. Vainly shall the poet paint a faithful portrait of men and manners; his labour shall remain a lifeless lump

till it receive a promethean touch from the fire of the actor. Nay, in this the public seem to acquiesce; for the last instrument, through the medium of which they immediately receive their pleasures, will ever be more considered as the intimate and welcome object of their commendation than the author, to whose person they are perfect strangers, and to whose merits they would have remained so but for the actor.

ROSCIUS is said to have given a most perfect idea of all the impassioned variety contained in the celebrated orations of CICERO without uttering a word. What perfect materials then must have composed the extraordinary mind of this wonderful man. But how shall we have to admire the strength of his head, and the goodness of his heart, if we believe CICERO himself, who tells us that ROSCIUS not only knew how to disseminate virtue among his auditors better than any other man, but was more correct in his practice of virtue in private life.

I know it may be opposed to me that actresses, in all ages, have made terrible ravages among the hearts of the spectators, and that the œconomy of many families has been too often deranged by the influence of their charms. Women, ornamented professedly with an intention to captivate, will ever

improperly attract the notice of the young and the irregular. The graces of beauty and talents, enhanced by the inticements of dress, naturally beget admiration and pleasure, and too many husbands and fathers have certainly sacrificed their wives and children at this shrine of voluptuousness. Nay, I am afraid, the scene has been, in some instances, reversed; and that the actor, while recommending constancy and honour from the stage, has raised sensations, throughout the boxes, not perfectly consistent with virtue in the breasts of the matron and the vestal.

But admitting this argument in its fullest extent, why is this remarked in particular of actors and actresses? I answer, because of the publicity of their situation. Were the private conduct of individuals in all other stations as well known, the world would be found to be a universal theatre no less in its particular than in its general manners. But there every irregularity is as much as possible hushed up or glossed over; and, but for the intervention now and then of Westminster Hall and Doctor's Commons, the great who look down on the stage would be considered as irreproachable and exemplary characters.

As to the Bar; as there certainly have been

instances in the private conduct of its members of rapacity and, I am afraid, dishonour; it is not to be supposed that individuals, for I contend for no more, have been remarkable for a superior degree of propriety, in their families and connections, than their neighbours; and of the Pulpit I shall only say, that churches are notoriously places of assignation, and that three-fourths of those unhappy wretches, who have been driven to prostitution by the arts of some young rake, or, perhaps, the overbearing landlord of their fathers, always begin the wretched story of their misfortunes, by telling you that they are clergymens' daughters.

I could go a great way into this, but that it would be foreign to my present purpose, and I shall have most powerful occasion to illustrate this point hereafter. I shall, therefore, only observe, that an object, however perfect, when placed upon a pinnacle, will appear to the purblind view of general observation to have many deformities, while the most rickety piece of real deformity shall halt through the croud without attracting particular notice. Individuals, of all professions, deserve reprehension, actors as well as others. Are all professions, therefore, to be stigmatized much less the profession of an actor exclusively? The idea is revolting, unworthy, and unjust: Perfection is not the lot

of human nature. Let not any part of the public, therefore, become obnoxious to censure by acting a perpetual solecism themselves in decrying those with their tongues whom it is their greatest pleasure to applaud with their hands.

As to the third proposition I stand nearly upon the same ground with other historians; and I can freely answer, that, if credit may be given to the various authors who have admitted the merit, and pointed out the beauties of the ancient and modern dramatic poets; who, by relating the events of states and empires, have necessarily involved in their narrations a history of those arts which have forwarded the great work of civilization; if the fidelity with which men more correctly speak of what interests the imagination than what merely relates to their affairs, which is remarkably apparent in whatever can be collected of the theatres; if these can be relied on, then are the events contained in this history of sufficient authority to interest the public.

I am not to learn the prodigious difficulty of pronouncing any thing to be true; or, with what diffidence and caution men ought to explore the labyrinth of events, which cannot be known to him but through the clue of the historian, often misled, and generally partial. Vague tradition may be true: apparent demonstration may be fallible.

A biographer of Sir WALTER RALEIGH informs us, that when he had nearly finished the second volume of his *History of the World*, being then a prisoner in the Tower, his attention was attracted by a dispute between an officer and a private centinel under his window. It appeared to him that the officer had improperly treated the poor soldier, and that the man had, with equal firmness and modesty, remonstrated against the oppression. A mob crowded about the disputants, and this was all he could collect of the affair.

A friend soon afterwards came to visit him, to whom he related what he thought he had witnessed. It turned out, however, that this friend had not only been present at the dispute but a mediator in it, and had been, therefore, perfectly competent to ascertain exactly the fact; which was, that the soldier had behaved very ill, and that the officer, in consideration of a proper concession, had, with great manliness and forbearance, forgiven him, when he might, consistently with his duty, have punished him.

Having heard his friend patiently out, Sir WALTER, with great coolness and determination, is said to have seized the different papers which composed his work and thrown them behind the fire, exclaiming; "How should I dare to avouch the au-

thenticity of facts which are supposed to have passed at such distant times, and in such remote parts of the world, when those in a common occurrence that passes under my window, are directly opposite to my comprehension of them."

This circumstance is indeed doubted, for we are told by another writer, that Sir WALTER burnt the second volume of his work because the first sold so slowly as to ruin his bookseller; and we are told, by himself, that this second and a third volume were only in preparation, but, as it is admitted on all sides, that the materials for such a work existed but were destroyed, this chain of circumstances concur to render the above relation probable. Be it, therefore, literally or virtually fact, it would be a lamentable thing that every author should be actuated by the same delicate scruples. It would go to the annihilation of enquiry, and facts themselves, however supported, would be supposed never to have existed. I own that circumstances, universally admitted, have been differently attributed; but are we to infer from this that these circumstances never occurred at all? Seven towns are said to contend for the birth of HOMER. Are we, therefore, to believe that there was no such person as HOMER. Indeed this last has been strongly insisted on. The *Fables* of ÆSOP have been attributed to HOMER, to SO-

CRATES, and even to SOLOMON. This does not prove they were not written, for by some means or other we are in possession of them, and a most wonderful work they are.

In these situations what are we to do? Since the certainty is so difficult to come at, we are to take the probability; which, in the business of ÆSOP, appears to be this: Fable was a poetical vehicle at the time of HOMER and HESIOD; and, no doubt, was used by them; but ÆSOP, having perfected what others began, is considered as the Father of Fable, just as ÆSCHYLUS is called the Father of Tragedy.

It is not, therefore, that because the leading features of facts are difficult to ascertain, that facts themselves are actually to be rejected. The germ of truth seems to be planted in the minds of all intellectual beings; and, though uncertain history, and more uncertain tradition, may have involved great events in doubt and contradiction, yet, that very doubt, and that very contradiction, have often gone to establish unanswerable confirmation that those events did exist.

How very similar is the war of the giants with the gods, to the war of the malignant angels with

the good. How remarkable is the resemblance of *Deucalion and Pyrrha*, to *Noah and the Flood*. So the universal admiration of a SUPREME BEING, acknowledged throughout creation even to the most ignorant idolaters—but the theme is endless; and, in the investigation of great truths, the wonder is not that fallible human nature should err so much, but that it should err so little.

As to the auxiliary proposition, its existence is made out by establishing the three others; for, if the stage be a vehicle to instruct and amuse; if the primary and relative characters are of universal celebrity; if the truth of the events are virtually confirmed by as indisputable authority as the events of other histories: then the subject of this work is of sufficient moment, its characters of sufficient importance, and its facts of sufficient authenticity to interest the public; and, if, through this subject, these characters, and these facts, the sweetest emotions that penetrate the breast, are excited; if the dangerous passions of hate, envy, avarice, and pride, with all their innumerable train of attendant vices, are detected and exposed; if love, friendship, gratitude, and all those active and generous virtues which warm and exalt the mind, are held up as objects of emulation; if ignorance is scouted, genius

encouraged, and a true polish set on that mirror which the wise men of all ages have selected as the most unerring vehicle to reflect the manners of mankind: then must this work create interest to such a degree as essentially to serve the purposes of truth and morality.

CHAP. II.

ASIATIC THEATRE.

CHINA more than three thousand years ago cultivated that art which somewhat later contributed to the renown of GREECE. The early principle of the ancient drama was to present living portraits of the times and manners, to reprehend vice, and inculcate morality and virtue, through the medium of action and dialogue. The drama, for a considerable time, was only held in honour throughout the vast country of CHINA, and the single town of ATHENS. ROME did not adopt it till four hundred years afterwards.

The tragedies represented by the Chinese were on moral subjects, supported by the examples of their heroes, and the maxims of their philosophers. The scenes and habits were prodigiously magnificent: their pieces, however, had neither regularity, interest, nor probability. Angels and devils were indiscriminately introduced, and whatever could convey a mystic sense of moral duty was awkwardly enforced, no matter by what means. They had,

however, performances of various kinds, calculated merely to entertain and surprise the spectators. An incredible number of extraordinary feats both of legerdemain and tumbling made up some of these, which they performed in so wonderful a manner, that if we credit the accounts we read, all we have ever seen of this species of amusement in EUROPE, cannot boast the smallest comparison of the most trifling of their tours in this way. These were performed, however, in still greater perfection by monkies and mice, the subtilties of which animals, it will easily be credited, have often made them pass for devils and forcerers*.

We are told by different travellers, that, though the Persians and the Indians are said to be the in-

* What an admirable idea for a pantomime in the Christmas-holidays! I hope it will be improved upon. A lion, according to Æsop, owed his preservation to a mouse: why should the English theatres, which bear, as their protection, the lion of ENGLAND, hesitate to promote their glory by the same means. Neither the *learned pig*, the *bare*, nor even *general Jacko* could cope with the mice. Mice have been of consequence ever since HOMER. I beg I may not be thought wickedly to allude to the mountain and the mouse: we know the theatres are bringing forth such mice as these every day, but they are not of the true Chinese breed. I would, therefore, advise to send for some of the right sort, in the first ships, and who knows, if the mice should grow as fond of English corn as Eunuchs are of English guineas, but CHINA may prove of as great advantage to the theatre, as ITALY has done to the opera-house.

ventors of dramatic entertainments, owing, probably, to their grotesque and fanciful dances, for which they are so famous, the Chinese claim an indisputable right to be acknowledged as the original founders of this art, which, though the severity of their manners prevented them from authorizing, was exhibited at the palaces of their richest mandarines where regular theatres were fitted up.

On days of regaling it was the custom to invite friends and send for actors, who brought with them lists of such pieces as they were prepared to perform. I have before me a history of one of those days of performance, which will shew, that though the Chinese never arrived to the regularity of the Greeks, at the time of *ÆSCHYLUS*, yet the drama, and all its best purposes, were as warmly felt then at CHINA as it was afterwards at Athens.

The piece, preceded by a prologue, was taken from history. An Emperor appeared surrounded by an admiring multitude on whom he had heaped benefits. His virtues became the subject of their eulogium, and they sometimes recited, and sometimes chanted orations to his praise.

This piece was followed by a farce full of intrigue, but void of drift or regularity; and to their

farce succeeded a pantomime, in which women, mounted on men's shoulders, went through a kind of exercise with fans following exactly the measure and movement of the music which accompanied them. Next came jugglers with cups and balls, and then tumblers and posture masters; these were followed by a man who thrust a tube into the wall and drew from it twenty different liquors at the word of command; another threw three knives into the air, which he managed so dexterously as repeatedly to catch one of them by the handle while the other two were suspended.

They were after this entertained with conjurors; who came in with birds, snakes, mice, and monkeys; which, as they were commanded, danced upon the ground and upon ropes, and formed themselves into all manner of figures relating to the sciences, and particularly to the mathematics, and to astronomy*.

* These were, no doubt, intended as improvements on dancing, which in many countries were taken in a mystical sense. The Egyptians imitated in their mysterious dances the ordinary rotation of the stars. The Indian priests danced before the image of their god VISNOU, who is said to have danced himself on the head of the serpent ADISSECKEN, whose tail encompassed the world. The biographer of Mon. GARDALLE goes farther and says, which, by the bye, is not very far distant from the truth, that all nations have introduced dancing into sacred worship. The Hebrews danced for joy after

At the palaces of the emperors the entertainments were of the same heterogeneous kind but much more grand. After some magnificent spectacle, founded, as usual, on history, a pantomime commenced by a Tartar, who sung a warlike song to the sound of a carillon; on which he performed with sticks of ivory. This was improved by the entrance of others into a duet, then into a trio, and at length into a chorus; accompanied, at last, by dancers, tumblers, wrestlers, and gladiators; with all which the theatre was filled, each performing his different part at the same time, with great vociferation, force, and agility. At length they were wrought into so violent a frenzy, that what commenced in jest finished in earnest; till it was with difficulty the prince himself could call off the performers, among whom several were often severely wounded.

their passage through the Red Sea; but, says he, "the most innocent exercises sometimes degenerate into abuse, for after they had danced before the ark of the covenant they forgot themselves and danced before the fatted calf." He then goes on and quotes the Count de GEBELIN, who has demonstrated, in a curious dissertation, that the minuet was the original dance performed by the priests in the Temple of APOLLÒ. The diagonal line and the two parallels that pervade the minuet are the symbol of the Zodiac; the twelve steps of which it is composed, explain the twelve signs, and the twelve months of the year. Again. The minuet begins with a profound obedience to the sun; and thus he goes on explaining till he proves, that there is not the smallest movement relative to the heavenly constellations but is exemplified in the minuet.

Actors, though slaves, were held by the Chinese in a respectable light. THYNGH TI, emperor of CHINA, became enamoured of an actress, and repudiated his wife to make her an empress. His mother, however, shrewdly remarking that the lady having been so used to act different parts, would not probably content herself with that single one which he had now given her to perform, the emperor, with a quick sense of his own absurdity, answered he had only placed the actress in that situation to see how well she could sustain her part, and that having had enough of the comedy, he should now reduce her to her primitive obscurity.

The most celebrated men of study and science are said to have planned and assisted at these representations. The Gymnosophists, who entirely gave themselves up to the study of reason, among others encouraged, as far as the severity of their manners would permit dramatic exhibitions in Asia. Their principal, called *Budda*, is ranked among the Brachmans, and the Brachmans are known to have cultivated religious truth through the medium of scenic fiction.

PILPAY, the celebrated fabulist, is in particular supposed to have contributed towards the reputation of the dramatic art in Asia; and this conjecture is ex-

tremely probable. He is well known to have governed a large kingdom in INDIA under a powerful emperor; and, as it might not have been safe to have uttered his political opinions to his master in the plain terms of unadorned truth—for in that case he might not have come off so well as the old woman who wished DIONYSIUS a long life lest there should come a worse tyrant in his stead; or the Visier who, pretending to understand the language of birds, informed his Sultan that the crows were croaking his praises for having massacred his subjects to provide them with carrion—it is not unlikely that PILPAY should endeavour to cheat his master into a love of virtue, by painting on the stage the hateful figure of vice. Indeed it was only one step further than what we know him to have done, for fables, as far as they go, are dramatic representations.

In JAPAN spectacles are followed with eager avidity, and the religion of the country, so far from condemning, authorizes and consecrates them. Their amusements are performed to celebrate feasts in honour of the divinities. They consist of singing and dancing to music, if it may be so called, performed by flutes, drums, cymbals, and large bells. As for the machinery and decorations, we have not a conception how wonderful they are.

Monstrous giants, floating cascades, moving mountains, peopled cities, and a variety of other objects as extraordinary, make up their pageants, and processions.

Their plays represent the adventures, both heroic and amorous, of their gods. They are distributed like ours, into scenes and acts. The prologue announces the plan, but never touches on the dénouement, which is always managed so as to surprise. The interludes and the farces, like those of the Chinese, are gross buffoonery; but their tragedies and comedies have always a moral tendency, which the stronger to enforce, the priests, upon particular occasions, sit in the most conspicuous places, and are the first to applaud.

The Persians also have a taste for these amusements. There is scarcely a petty governor without his tumblers, his déclamers, his musicians, and his dancers. In this part of ASIA their pieces consist of indecent pictures of love, and the most unbridled libertinism. Their dances are not a whit behind hand in lasciviousness.—For lightness, however, quickness, and variety, FRANCE is infinitely inferior, and the best dancers that ever graced our opera can boast no more comparison with the Persian girls, than can the worst figurante swim, slide,

and posture with PARISOT. The young ladies alone are permitted to practice this harmless amusement, and are on that account considered as infamous.

It will evidently be seen that the drama flourishes best where morality is most inculcated. Among the softened and effeminate Persians we have seen the stage imitating all the unprincipled audacity of a stew. Of this the Jesuits who visited GOA were aware, and, therefore began their mission with teaching the inhabitants a play which they called *The establishment of the Christian faith in India*. The spectacle itself, though little short of blasphemy, drew converts from all quarters; indeed, those who have been accustomed to Roman catholic countries will not find any thing extraordinary in this species of sanctified knavery: the farce performed on holy-thursday, in SPAIN and PORTUGAL, is full as impious as the mummery of the most subtle monk who pretends to convert Indian ignorance to a veneration of that faith of which he himself makes a jest.

ASIA, however, even to this hour can boast, nothing regular in the dramatic art; which, certainly, under the influence of the priests, and particularly the Jesuits, spread itself into many

countries, but no where with such enthusiasm as into SIBERIA; where, among other blasphemous representations, for the purpose of desseminating religion, they perform the redemption as a play, the baptism as a farce, and recite the commandments as an interlude.

The empress ELIZABETH, however, corrected in great measure these barbarisms by erecting an opera house at MOSCOW. After this another was built at PETERSBURGH, where an opera was performed in the Russian language. The author, the composer, and the performers were all Russians. At length CATHERINE the Second invited to her capital the charming GALLUPPI, surnamed BURANELLI, who was at that time master of music to the chapel of St. MARK at VENICE, and one of the most celebrated composers of modern ITALY*.

* This great man was born to perfect the musical taste of all countries. He had before this time brought simplicity and all the true and natural beauty of melody to its maturest perfection in ITALY. He had carried the Italian opera in England to that high pitch of excellence and reputation, from which it has ever since been on a gradual decline, and the bewitching and touching effects of his familiar melodies, in conjunction with other composers, principally his imitators, who gave the Venetian ballads to the world, so totally altered the style of French music, that what had ever before been harshness and dissonance, became under habile masters, but particularly PHILIDOR, objects of imitation in all other countries, though heaven knows it has lamentably degenerated since.

This composer, like another ORPHEUS, charmed the rugged Russians by the power of his music. It is astonishing with what avidity it was relished. After the first representation of his *Didone Abandonata*, the empress gave him with her own hand a magnificent box filled with gold, and he was treated by all ranks with the most singular marks of favour and consideration.

To GALLUPPI succeed TRAETTA the Neapolitan; a man certainly less celebrated, but capable of keeping up what had been so well established by his predecessor. Performers were invited of the best celebrity; till, at length, the opera at PETERSBURGH became one of the most brilliant in Europe*.

* Certainly, in my description of the opera at PETERSBURGH, I have rambled out of ASIA; but I did so to shew that—whatever may have been the improvement of the Russian stage, but more particularly the opera, for certainly the theatre even to this hour is in a very barbarous state, notwithstanding all the encouragement and honours that have been heaped on the actors, some of whom have been ennobled—from Asiatic Russia came originally the dramatic art to Moscow, and afterwards to PETERSBURGH; where, in proportion as the people grew polished, they called in auxiliary assistance from those nations in which the arts were in greater forwardness.

CHAP. III.

GRECIAN THEATRE,
FROM ITS ORIGIN TO THE TIME OF ÆSCHYLUS.

THOUGH we find traces of the dramatic art in all nations back to the remotest antiquity, even 'till its origin, is lost in the night of time, yet it seems to have attained no perfection till it became memorable in GREECE. Simplified there, it grew interesting and important. It celebrated among that people recent events of which their fathers had been witnesses. All the subjects of their theatre were comprized in the histories of a few families; no foreign heroes presumed to usurp those tears that deplored the misfortunes of their proper citizens.

In the theatre, as in the field, and in the areopagus the Greeks were possessed with the spirit of real patriotism. They acknowledged the representative of no hero but in his true history, and a great action had no charms for them unless it was legitimate, and as it were naturalized. Liberty converted every town into an empire, and the greatness

of soul which inspired this fame inspired poets with the genius to celebrate it.

A tragedy was not merely an amusement, not an exhibition to beguile a moment of leisure, it was an affair of state; and the Athenian spectators saw their duty as men through the transparent veil of allegory: nor was there a Grecian sailor who did not taste the beauties of SOPHOCLES and EURIPIDES.

Inclination to occupy time, with a view to destroy that lassitude natural to man, begat in him a taste for those studies which are called the arts, and which are purely an imitation of nature. The Gymnastic and other exercises in GREECE were thus improvements of similar games, to which all people have been accustomed ever since the primitive union of man into society.

The Isthmian games instituted in honour of NEPTUNE, and revived with particular attention by THESEUS, king of ATHENS, who reigned twelve hundred years before the christian æra, were the first, of which poetry and music made apart. In these games were introduced the sports of the chase, where were seen rare and scarce animals, purposely brought from all parts of the known world, and

these games in the end fixed the epoch of all the inhabitants of the Isthmus of CORINTH.

Seven centuries after THESEUS, THEMISTOCLES instituted a new combat of poetry and music, which made a part of the Panathænean Feasts, in honour of MINERVA. In these feasts dramatic pieces were introduced. Each poet was permitted to bring forward, to the number of four, and this assemblage was called *Tetralogy*. The prize of the victors was a crown of olive branches and a barrel of oil, which was considered as a present from the goddess whose glory these sports celebrated. We know not what these dramatic pieces were at that time; there were none of any particular distinction, the term Tragedy confounded every thing, and it was long after this period that the art had its divisions.

Tragedy, according to an ancient tradition, generally adopted, owed its origin to an accident. ICARIUS, the proprietor of a village in ATTICA, where it is said the vine was originally cultivated, having one day found a he-goat feasting on his grapes, killed it and divided it among his peasants; who, in their merriment, decorated themselves with branches of trees and danced round the animal destined for their banquet. This novelty attracted

numbers of spectators, who were so struck with it, that, at length, it became a custom in several places during the wine harvest.

As these peasants grew intoxicated at their feasts, and the greatest part of them had reason to complain of such Athenians as had large possessions in the country, they abandoned themselves without reserve to their resentment, braved their oppressors, and called aloud at their doors for redress, to the great entertainment of the multitude that surrounded them. The chiefs of justice even authorized this annual remonstrance of an oppressed people, taking care, however, that the fear of chastisement and the danger of reproach should operate so as to prevent violence. This method became a remedy against public disorder, and the feast of the goat was at length introduced at ATHENS.

The peasants were invited from all parts to appear at this spectacle, which was performed in a field near a grove of poplars called *Œgyron*, and the branches of the trees, interlaced, served as a sort of scaffold, from whence the performers amused the multitude. The field being near the Temple of Bacchus, this entertainment insensibly introduced itself as a part of the worship of the God of Wine.

During the sacrifice, the priests and the people sung hymns to the Deity in chorus, which, from the name of the victim, were called *Tragedy; or Song of the Goat*. These feasts became general, not only in the temples, but in the villages, where a man, in the character of *SILENUS*, rode on an ass, and was followed by a promiscuous troop of votaries, who, glass in hand, sung verses in honour of *BACCHUS*.

These monotonous hymns, however, grew very tiresome and disgusting till *EPIGENE*, a Sicyonian, conceived the idea of giving a new form to this species of spectacle. He produced a tragedy less objectionable, which he entitled *Bacchus*; but it was, however, so little to the honour of the god, that the spectators, at its first representation, cried out, "What has this to do with *BACCHUS*?" This criticism proves that though they yet knew but little of the dramatic art, its germ, which afterwards burst forth and grew to perfection, existed at that time in the Greeks.

THESPIUS, who was born at Icaria, a town of Attica, fatigued like the rest with this barbarous nonsense that outraged the understanding of the people, and dishonoured the god it professed to idolize, determined to write pieces and introduce

recitation. This novelty pleased. He produced several entertainments of this description, which he and others represented from village to village mounted on a cart, from whence they declaimed in grotesque dresses, and with faces frightfully painted.

BACCHUS was very soon after this left out of the party, for now both THESPIS and EPIGENE employed themselves in exposing the vices and follies of their countrymen; and to as good a purpose as ICARIUS and his companions, who, as we have seen, brought their oppressors of ATHENS by the same method to reason and a sense of their duty as citizens.

These laudable attempts, however, were not long attended with success, for, though the people, when they became accustomed to them listened with great satisfaction, SOLON opposed them as a dangerous innovation. He forbade THESPIS not only to write but to teach the art of composing tragedies at ATHENS, probably because he had at that time so many jarring interests to reconcile*. This prohi-

* At the time when SOLON was in the zenith of his reputation at ATHENS, THESPIS one day was performing a tragedy, at which the people appeared wonderfully pleased. When it was over, SOLON asked the author whether he was not ashamed to tell so many lies in the face of the world? Not at all, said THESPIS, tis only in

bition seems, however, to be but little regarded, for THESPIS after this not only wrote tragedies but had for a scholar PHRYNICHUS, an Athenian. He is spoken of as the first who made history the subject of tragedy, who introduced the characters of women on the stage, and who invented tetrametre verse.

PHRYNICHUS was condemned to pay a thousand drachms for having produced a piece called *Miletus taken by Darius*. He was considered by the Athenians the more culpable because he had forced tears from the spectators at the moment he painted in lively colours the desolation of that town; and thus he was at once the victim of their pride, and the object of their pleasure. Notwithstanding, however, his countrymen persecuted him for pleasing them, he afterwards became a general in the army, and to this was, probably, owing the vehemence which appeared to characterize his tragedies.

ALCEUS, another Grecian, held a high rank

jest. In jest! cried SOLON, striking his stick vehemently against the ground, so much the worse; those who encourage falsehood in jest may at last approve of it in earnest; and I should not wonder, if this were long permitted, that by rejecting truth, our government and our public affairs should in like manner become the jest of the people.

among the tragic poets of that time. There cannot be collected, however, more than the titles of two of his pieces.

CHŒRILUS is said to have written a hundred and fifty tragedies, and to have been thirteen times crowned victor. The prize obtained upon these occasions still adverted to the feasts of BACCHUS, for it consisted of a goat and a measure of wine. Nothing is known of these pieces of CHŒRILUS, except one of them, but he is memorable for being the first who decorated the scene, and habited the actors like the persons they represented*.

CEPHISODORUS was among the number of the authors of the ancient tragedy. They attribute to him

* CHOERILUS was considered by SUIDAS and ANTHENÆUS as the original author of Masques; there can be no doubt, however, but the pieces anterior to THESPIS are of that species. HORACE attributes them to ÆCHYLUS; which, by the bye, is a conjecture ventured very much at hazard, for they are in no respect in his style; but ARISTOTLE; with more good sense, informs us, that the real inventor of them, and even the time when they were originally introduced is unknown. The fact is this: All the dramatic pieces, both in ASIA and elsewhere before ÆCHYLUS, were an irregular jumble of recitation and singing, and therefore Masques. The ARABIAN word *mascara* signifies rillery, and buffoonery; and pieces of this description, as we have seen, were represented in ASIA, consequently the conjecture of ARISTOTLE ought to be credited.

five pieces, which, like the rest, were nothing more than a sort of dithyrambic, begun as we have seen by THESPIIS, and in some degree improved afterwards; but it remained for ÆSCHYLUS, to dispel this mist and eclipse these constellations which, at his appearance, receded like stars at sun rise.

CHAP. IV.

ÆSCHYLUS, SOPHOCLES, AND EURIPIDES, AND THE
PROGRESS OF TRAGEDY IN GREECE.

ÆSCHYLUS, who was hailed the Father of Tragedy, soon simplified and regulated dramatic representations. He divided his pieces into acts, or episodes, that contained the exposition of the subject, the conduct of the plot, and the development of the catastrophe. He reserved the primitive chorus, no otherwise, however, than as an auxiliary, for the purpose of rendering the subject more interesting*.

* Tragedy was originally, as we have seen, no more than a single person who sung dithyrambics or hymns in praise of BACCHUS. THESPIS added a single person to relieve the chorus. ÆSCHYLUS finding a single person uninteresting, added a second, and at the same time threw the chorus, as much as possible, into the back ground. All that had been performed between the four songs of the chorus they called *Episode*; the songs of the chorus being the acts, and the episode the act time. But when tragedy came to be formed by ÆSCHYLUS, the matter was reversed, and what had been the auxiliary became the principal. Then the interest of the piece was the primary object and the chorus, which was now used merely as an interval between the acts, still heightened the effect of the piece itself by, sometimes reciting, and sometimes singing, such subjects as belonged to it im-

The degree of perfection to which *ÆSCHYLUS* brought the dramatic art in GREECE, procured him great respect and consideration, to which his public conduct, as a citizen, materially contributed. Born of one of the best families in ATTICA, he distinguished himself very early in the field. He was the pupil of Pythagoras, and at twenty-five disputed the poetic prize. He was the first who brought two characters forward on the stage at the same time; he invented the robe and the buskin, and considerably heightened the effect of his pieces by appropriate decorations of the personages. His improvements were so rapid and so effectual that he was thought to have been inspired.

PAUSANIUS says, that while *ÆSCHYLUS* was asleep under the shadow of a vine, *BACCHUS* appeared to him in a dream, and commanded him to write tragedies. This fable arose, probably, from his fondness for wine, for he wrote as he drank; and upon all occasions, invoked *APOLLO* less than *BACCHUS*, if we believe *CALLISTHENES* and *PLUTARCH*. Whatever god inspired his verse, it is certainly full of nature, warmth, and energy. He is, however,

mediately, or as illustrated some point relative to it. The recitation was performed by their chief called *CHORYPHEUS*, who first recited and then led the song followed by the rest. I should not wonder at seeing an assertion that this was the original idea of the fugue in music.

reproached, and with reason, for introducing hardi-
nesses and crudeties; his images were gigantic and
frightful, and the whole drift of his pieces was
calculated to inspire terror rather than pity or
delight*.

It must not be forgotten, however, that tragedy,
at the time of ÆSCHYLUS, was in its infancy, that
it was his offspring, and that he trusted it in the
world that it might, by the fostering care of others,
grow to maturity.

It has been warmly insisted on, and surely with
good reason, that ÆSCHYLUS was less the perfecter
of the works of THESPIUS than the imitator of those
of HOMER. The Epopœia is a more natural assimi-
lation to tragedy than those monstrous rhapsodies
which were chanted in honour of BACCHUS; and,
though the priests, upon this as upon all other oc-
casions, were glad enough to beget an interest in

* In the Tragedy of *Eumenides*, written by ÆSCHYLUS, ORESTES
in the first act appeared surrounded with furies lulled asleep by
APOLLO. Their dresses were black with sanguinary ornaments. In
one hand they held a torch, from which issued a faint and quivering
flame, and in the other a rod of serpents. Their heads were covered
with furious adders, and their faces were so frightfully horrible,
that, the moment they awoke and began to walk tumultuously on the
stage, women were said to have miscarried, and children to have died
with fear.

favour of their Deity, in whose name they hoodwinked the people; yet celebrating the achievements of kings and heroes among a nation of warriors, was more likely to rouse their feelings as it brought them acquainted with conduct which it was both their inclination and their duty to emulate. Of this, most probably, *ÆSCHYLUS* was aware, and as he imitated the heroes of *HOMER* with his sword, so did he *HOMER* himself with his pen.

ÆSCHYLUS served at the battle of Marathon, and at the sea fight of Salamis, where *AMINIAS* his brother commanded a squadron of ships and signalized himself above all the Athenians. To this brother our poet, upon a particular occasion, was indebted for his life. In one of his pieces he made *THETIS*, speaking of *APOLLO*, utter some expressions which were considered as blasphemy, and in another he introduced some equivocal pleasantries in allusion to the mysteries of *CERES*. For these crimes he was chased from the theatre, and would have been stoned to death but for *AMINIAS*; who, throwing aside his cloak and shewing the stump of his arm, reminded the people of his gallantry at the fight of Salamis. This moved the spectators to pity, and they pardoned *ÆSCHYLUS*, who, however, could not stomach this indignity, and was, therefore,

determined to withdraw from a place where his life had been in danger.

This determination was confirmed by the neglect of his pieces, and the rising success of SOPHOCLES, who obtained the prize from him, though some say it was SIMONIDES in an elegy on the battle of Marathon*. He, therefore, retired into SICILY, and was received into the court of HIERON, who was then building the city of ÆTNA, which our poet celebrated in a tragedy of the same name. Here he resided three years covered with honours, when his death was occasioned by a singular accident.

An eagle having soared a great height with a tortoise in his talons, let it fall on the head of ÆSCHYLUS, of which blow he died, and by his death

* The fact was that SIMONIDES was victor in the elegy on the battle of Marathon, and SOPHOCLES, as we shall see hereafter, when CIMON brought back the bones of THESEUS. The battle of Marathon was fought three years after SOPHOCLES was born, and SIMONIDES might certainly have on that occasion obtained a prize; but it seems to have given ÆSCHYLUS very little concern, for he continued after that to write with unrivalled reputation for two and twenty years; and being then old, and his genius on the decline, no wonder SOPHOCLES, with the ardour of youth, and the example of so great a master in his favour, got the better in this contest, which, every thing considered, appears to be no material deduction from the brilliant reputation of ÆSCHYLUS.

seemed to be verified a pretended declaration of the Oracle at DELPHOS, that a blow from heaven should accelerate the death of ÆSCHYLUS.

It has been said that the seats of the theatre broke down during the representation of one of the tragedies of ÆSCHYLUS; and SUIDAS tells us that it was the cause of his retiring into SICILY; but this is absurd, for the large croud necessary to break down the seats is a proof of the celebrity of ÆSCHYLUS; but he means to insinuate, that with the seats the reputation of ÆSCHYLUS which was eclipsed by SOPHOCLES, fell to the ground.

The operation of this accident, however, proclaims in very loud terms the fame of ÆSCHYLUS, for from these ruins sprung up those magnificent theatres, which were afterwards so nobly imitated by the Romans. They were built circular on one side, and square on the other, the semi-circle contained the spectators, who were ranged in seats, one above another, and in the quadrangle was exhibited the spectacle. They had machines of every sort for the conveyance of gods and goddesses, which they summoned at pleasure from the sea, from hell, or from heaven. Their scenes represented palaces, and temples, squares in perspective, and towns in the distance. They had transforma-

tions, embellishments, and every species of decoration and ornament to be seen on the modern stage, but prepared at a much greater expence; and, of course, represented with infinitely more grandeur*.

Near that part of the building in which the spectators sat, there were three porticos where they might retire in case of bad weather; for it is remarkable that the ancient theatres were almost entirely uncovered. On the other hand, to prevent inconvenience from the heat of the sun, they extended veils—some of which were very costly—by means of cords attached to the extremity of the building; and, that nothing might be omitted that could in the smallest degree contribute to their pleasure, statues of excellent workmanship were placed in regular order, supporting urns, beautifully ornamented; those urns receiving streams deliciously perfumed, which issued from picturesque fountains, the whole variously formed, and judiciously arranged.

The theatre was so capacious that the actors

* SOPHOCLES gave additional magnificence to the construction of the theatres of ATHENS. The expence for the extension of these edifices, and for the acquisition of what he thought necessary to ornament one of his tragedies, brought a reproach on the Athenians of having expended more riches on a single dramatic representation, than in their wars against the barbarians.

were obliged to wear masks, which were perfectly a machine calculated to extend the voice, so that it might reach every ear in so vast a space; to facilitate which, there were also vases of brass placed in the intervals of the amphitheatre with such art, in such a direction, and composed of such tempered materials, that they assisted the tones of the voice and instruments; and, by this consonance, rendered the sound stronger, more agreeable, and more distinct.

All these magnificent improvements sprung from the fall of ÆSCHYLUS, whose theatre, like ANTEUS, touched the earth only that it might rise with renovated strength*.

ÆSCHYLUS had two sons, and five nephews, all

* There are authors who dispute this fact, and tell us that the accident, described above, happened during the representation of a tragedy written by one PRATINAS. The probability appears to lye between the two stories. The word scene is originally from the Greek, and signifies a hut, a booth, a tent, or other place where dramatic representations were anciently performed. The œgyron was used as well to form a stage as to serve as a shelter for the populace. Thus these representations from the first were at times itinerant or stationary according to circumstances; and there can be no doubt but that the scenic art, in the progress of its improvement, improved the scene itself. Thus, sometimes, fortuitously, and sometimes by design, it became more and more regular till at length it attained to that splendour which grew into magnificence under SOPHOCLES.

of whom wrote with various success for the theatre. BION, his second son, was ranked among the poets called Railers, and was, probably, one of those who wrote comedy. They are said to have written among them a prodigious number of pieces, some of which are yet to be seen; but, as ÆSCHYLUS eclipsed his predecessors, so his imitators served only to raise the superior fame of SOPHOCLES.

SOPHOCLES was born at COLONOS, a town of ATTICA, in the first year of the seventy-first Olympiad, which place he rendered afterwards celebrated by his tragedy of *Oedippus of Colonos*.

SOPHOCLES operated a second revolution in tragedy. He introduced a third actor, and augmented the number of the chorus to fifteen instead of twelve, at which number ÆSCHYLUS had fixed it. He also allowed the chorus to have an interest in the main action, so that by this means every thing was of a piece, and all the performers had such parts allotted them as contributed to one uniform and regular design.

At the age of twenty-five he bore away the prize from his master, ÆSCHYLUS, in tragedy. An extraordinary occasion was the cause of this contention. CIMON, the Athenian general, had found

the bones of THESEUS, and brought them in solemn pomp to the city, on which a trial of skill between the tragedians was instantly appointed. ÆSCHYLUS and SOPHOCLES strove nobly for pre-eminence, but, in spite of the acknowledged and admired merit of the master, the superior fire and eloquence of the scholar bore away the palm.

Before SOPHOCLES, the prize was disputed by four dramatic pieces comprized under the name of Tetralogy. The three first were tragedies, and the fourth called *Satire*, being a species of comedy; but this SOPHOCLES altered, by opposing, in all contentions, tragedy to tragedy.

SOPHOCLES did not always appear in his tragedies on account of the weakness of his voice. His fame was not, however, diminished by this; for if ÆSCHYLUS merited the title of Father of Tragedy, SOPHOCLES might, with propriety be called the Master of it. The admiration and wonder with which all GREECE spoke of his wisdom induced an opinion that he was the immediate favourite and intimate of the gods. We are told that ÆSCHYLUS condescended to visit him at his house, and TULLY would have you believe that HERCULES had an equal respect for him. APOLLONIUS TYANENSIS, in his oration before DOMITIAN, tells the em-

peror that SOPHOCLES, the Athenian, was able to check and restrain the impetuosity of the winds.

Certainly he was a genius of transcendent merit. His tragedies served as a model for ARISTOTLE'S *Art of Poetry*, PLATO'S advances in philosophy were compared with the improvements of SOPHOCLES in tragedy; TULLY calls him the divine poet and VIRGIL has given him a marking preference to all other writers of tragedy. So charming was his poetry that he was called the Bee; and to transmit this eulogium to posterity, a hive was carved upon his tomb, not less to impress the world with an idea of the sweetness of his verse than the diligence of his industry.

SOPHOCLES, like his predecessor ÆSCHYLUS, was ranked among the defenders of his country. He commanded an army in conjunction with PERICLES to chastise the rebellious Samians; from which expedition he returned triumphant. His fame followed him in every thing he undertook, even to old age, at which time, he is reported to have retained his faculties with all the fire and vigour of youth, and of this there is a remarkable instance.

SOPHOCLES had four sons; who, tired with so

long a dependance on an old man, represented him to the judges as a drivler, and a person incapable of governing his family, or taking charge of his affairs. SOPHOCLES confounded them by a trait which they little expected. He had just finished his *Oedipus of Colonos*, and all his answer to this unjust accusation, was a request that the judges would read his tragedy. They did so, and found in it such strength of mind, such beauty, such truth, and such persuasion, that they dismissed him with an acclamation of praise, and his sons covered with confusion; nay LUCIAN, who tells the story, adds, that the sons were voted madmen for having accused him.

There are three different accounts of the death of SOPHOCLES. PLINY, and VALERIUS MAXIMUS, say that he died of excess of joy in his ninety-fifth year, at the success of one of his tragedies. Others say, that in reciting his tragedy of *Antigonus*, he kept his breath so long that it stopt the action of his lungs; but LUCIAN tells us that he was choked by a grape stone*.

* 'Tis not wonderful that a man of ninety-five should die suddenly, nor that his death should be accelerated by an extraordinary effort of both mind and body. We may, therefore, believe that SOPHOCLES died immediately upon his great success in gaining a

PLUTARCH says, that one of the sons of SOPHOCLES was a cotemporary writer with his father, and from other authors we learn that another of his sons, and two nephews, wrote pieces both tragic and lyric. We know nothing, however, of these pieces, or even of their titles.

EURIPIDES, according to some, was born at PHYLA, a town of ATTICA, and according to others at SALAMIS, about the first year of the seventy-fifth Olympiad. He is said to have been the pupil of ANAXAGORAS, and intimately known to SOCRATES. He fortunately discovered the works of HERACLITUS, which were hid in the Temple of Diana; and from this commerce with these sages, and the advantage he reaped from consulting them, and reading their works, sprung that luminous moral which pervaded his tragedies.

SUIDAS says, that the mother of EURIPIDES was nobly descended; though ARISTOPHANES calls her a cabbage seller, and VALERIUS MAXIMUS, taking the assertion, which was probably a jest, for

prize so late in life. It is also probable, that a grape stone might accidentally hasten his end, but the very same thing is told of ANACREON, and the assertion has ever I believe, been considered more as poetic than true.

truth, gravely records it. It should seem, however, that his parents were persons of some consideration, for they consulted the Oracle of Apollo concerning him before he was born; and, having received an ambiguous promise that the world should witness his fame, and that he should gain a crown, they bred up their son in a proper manner to qualify him for a wrestler, under an idea that the Oracle meant no more than that he should obtain the Athletic crown, which he actually did, at the feasts in honour of CERES.

The genius of EURIPIDES, however, soon impelled him to abandon the exercises of the body for the exercises of the mind; and first he studied painting, in which he is said to have made a considerable progress, but morality and philosophy were the studies most congenial to his mind, and as these, philosophy particularly, had not yet been so much the drift of dramatic representations as he wished, he determined to add this perfection to the stage.

This gift which he possessed in an eminent degree, though he improved the stage in no other respect, begat for him a most extraordinary portion of cotemporary fame. His pieces are not spoken so highly of as to perfectness as those of SOPHOCLES, but the verses they contained were in the mouths

of all countries where the Greeks were known. If prisoners pleaded their cause in the language of EURIPIDES, their reward was life and liberty.

He was called the Philosophic poet. ALEXANDER is said to have admired him above all other writers; SOCRATES, who never had been accustomed to visit the theatre, went there to hear the tragedies of EURIPIDES; DEMOSTHENES learnt declamation from them, and CICERO was in the act of reading them when he was surrounded and assassinated.

Nevertheless it cannot be said that EURIPIDES did so much for the posthumous fame of the drama, or its real interest as SOPHOCLES. The chorus which SOPHOCLES had regulated, EURIPIDES altered and made it entirely independant of the main business. ARISTOTLE gives SOPHOCLES the preference in manners, æconomy, and style. DIONYSIUS HARLICARNASSENSIS commends SOPHOCLES for chusing the most generous and most noble passions for his subjects, whereas EURIPIDES chose dishonest, abject, and effeminate passions; and, again, because SOPHOCLES never says any thing but what is exactly necessary, while EURIPIDES amuses the reader with oratorical deductions.

In short, the general agreement between all those who have written of these admirable authors is, that one amused, the other convinced; one appealed to the passions, the other to reason; one had the peculiar gift of imposing any thing for truth, the other had no eloquence but what was derived from truth itself.

EURIPIDES, it is said, wrote ninety-two tragedies, but the general belief is, that he wrote no more than seventy-five, nineteen of which are extant, and the titles of fourteen others are recorded, but the pieces themselves are not known. Like *ÆSCHYLUS* and *SOPHOCLES*, he met with an extraordinary death.

About a year after the Sicilians were defeated he left Athens and went to reside at the court of Macedon, being invited by *ARCHILAUS*, who was accustomed to confer acts of munificence on learned men, and even to raise them to very high honours. *EURIPIDES*, if *SOLINUS* speaks truth, was made his prime minister.

One evening in a wood, whether he had wandered in deep contemplation, he was furrounded by dogs and torne to pieces. Different causes are assigned for this unfortunate death. Some say that

the dogs were let loose upon him by his rivals, who had reason enough to be jealous of those high distinctions paid to him by *ARCHELAUS*; others that the whole was purely an accident, for that having strayed while he was lost in meditation near a part of the palace, which was guarded by these dogs, as a security against depredators, he was there surprized and thus became their victim.

Exaggerated accounts go so far as to say that *EURIPIDES* was torn to pieces by women in revenge for his having exclaimed against them in his tragedies*, but to this no credit has been given. Indeed the general belief is, that either by accident or design he met with the death above related.

With *SOPHOCLES*, who lived before and died

* Historians are so extremely fond of introducing similar circumstances into the deaths of their celebrated men, that we should be wary as to the degree of credit we give them. Who does not see in this report of *EURIPIDES*, that his biographer has borrowed for him the death of *ORPHEUS*, who met with a similar fate from the women of *THRACE*, exactly as *SOPHOCLES* has been given the death of *ANACREON*. But on what ground must the assertion stand, if it be true, and we are gravely informed it is so, that there was no such person as *ORPHEUS*; that his adventures are a fable; and that his works, which are supposed to have been transmitted from the ancients, and lately discovered, are written by the ingenious and learned *Dr. JORTON*. But to go on a little further with *EURI-*

after EURIPIDES *, died also every hope of advancement in tragedy. A great number of authors are said to have written tragedies, and to have borne away many prizes, but we know nothing of them of sufficient celebrity to render their names worthy of particular notice; for they grew at last into such disrepute that their productions only served as food for the insatiate appetite of ARISTOPHANES, by whom none of them were spared; and nothing can be so strong a proof of degeneracy in tragedy as its falling successfully under the lash of the comic muse.

DIONYSIUS, the tyrant of SICILY, was ambitious to be ranked among the tragic poets. LUCIAN says that he procured some tablets, on which ÆSCHYLUS had set down memorandums, that served as the ground work of his pieces, and, pos-

PIDES. Not only the novelty of his extraordinary death is given to him, but his tomb is said to have been struck with lightning as a seal of divinity, which the memory of no man ever was honoured with before except LYCURGUS the lawgiver.

* This assertion bears itself out as well as most of those which pretend to ascertain any thing concerning antiquity. The majority of writers agree that SOPHOCLES was ninety-five when he died; if so, he must have lived three years after EURIPIDES. There is, however, a respectable Chronological Table which says, that he died at ninety-one, and that EURIPIDES lived a year after him.

fessed of these, he thought he had come at the whole mystery; but he was miserably deceived. No one gave him that credit which he flattered himself he merited. To induce a general belief of his talents, he endeavoured to make the poet, PHILOXENUS*, whose pliability, as a courtier, he had reason to count upon, bolster up his fame, by testifying a full approbation of his verses. In this, however, he failed. The poet, flexible in all other things, was obstinate when touched on the side of his professional judgement. To requite his sincerity DIONYSIUS committed him to prison; but after a time, remanded him in hopes that his sufferings in confinement would make him something more accommodating. Being informed upon what condition he was released, 'Carry me back to prison,' said the poet. This firmness moved DIONYSIUS who pardoned PHILOXENUS, and treated him ever afterwards with consideration and respect†.

* PHILOXENUS was the scholar of TELESTUS, a poet of some reputation, they both wrote *Dithyrambics*, but neither of them regular tragedy.

† Of Louis the Fourteenth, who was as fond of encouraging as of emulating the merit of poets, they tell a story exactly the reverse of this. He shewed some verses to a courtier and asked his opinion of them, who returned for answer, that they were very bad. 'I thought so,' said he, 'for I wrote them myself!' Upon this the

He was not, however, cured of his poetic propensity; for, though we know nothing of the pieces he wrote, it is allowed there were several of them; and, though no one has attempted to speak in favour of them, PLINY says, that, like SOPHOCLES, he died for joy at obtaining a prize, the merit of which PLUTARCH attributes to ANTIPHON, one of the sons of SOPHOCLES.

GREECE rendered the most distinguished honours both to the works and the memory of her three tragic poets. An edict was issued to erect their statues. Their works were preserved, and the greatest part entered in the archives. PTOLEMY, king of EGYPT, was very anxious to be in possession of them, and above all of the works of EURIPIDES, to embellish his Alexandrian library; but they were refused, and he, in his turn, refused corn to the Athenians during a dearth. Necessity at length obliged the Athenians to comply with his request, and he, in return, nobly permitted the Athenian merchants to import as much corn as they pleased, without paying the ordinary tribute.

It was a custom at ATHENS, in the lyric spec-

courtier begged leave to reconsider them, 'No, no,' said the king, 'I shan't suffer that, its of more consequence that you should speak truth than that I should write good verses.'

tacles, to sing the great actions of their chiefs; THEMISTOCLES was one day asked which voice pleased him the best? "That," replied he, "which sings my praises."

SOPHOCLES and EURIPIDES were set against each other by false friends, and their animosity became continual amusement for all the would-be-wits of GREECE.—Time, however, convinced these great men of their mutual error, as may be seen in the following letter from EURIPIDES.

"Inconstancy is not my character. I have retained every friend except SOPHOCLES; though I no longer see him, I do not hate him. Injustice has alienated me from him; justice reproaches me for it. I hope time will cement our re-union. What mortal ill is not caused at times by those wicked spirits who are never so happy as when they sow dissention among those who by nature and reason are meant to promote the felicity of each other."

As an instance how chaste and moral the Grecian poets were obliged to be, EURIPIDES having, in his tragedy of *Belephoron*, which is now lost, made one of his characters say, "Riches are the sovereign good of mankind, and may well excite

the admiration of men and gods," the spectators rose, and would have banished the poet from the town had they not found, at the finish of the piece, that the panegyrist in favour of riches, by way of poetical justice, met with a miserable and merited death.

Ten judges were chosen at ATHENS to decide what pieces merited the preference. They had places set apart for them. They were men of well-known merit, and strict integrity. They took an oath to decide equitably, and without the smallest regard to solicitations from any quarter*. Their authority extended so far that they had a right not only to recompense men of merit, but to punish, even to whipping, those who were destitute of it†.

* How different in ENGLAND. The only description of critics who pretend to decide on the theatrical productions here, are the editors of newspapers. These, however, are so little like the Athenian judges, that instead of paying no regard to private solicitations, they never write but in conformity with the wishes of all the parties concerned. Free tickets, the admission now and then of an execrable farce, secret intelligence with actresses and female authors, and other corrupt influence, blunt the edge of their satire, which, indeed, would be dull enough at any rate. But it were charity to wish that this should continue, for as they have not judgment to decide equitably, were they to take an oath so to do, it is not *impossible* but a CRITIQUE might *now and then* turn out a PERJURY.

† This I would not wish to have in ENGLAND, for in that case, good heaven! how many poets should we see at the cart's tail.

LUCIAN tells us of one EVANGELUS who was whipped, and it is said that SOPHOCLES was adjudged, upon a certain occasion, the prefectorship of SAMOS.

But the incorporating national events with dramatic poetry seems to have been the happiest and most meritorious perfection which the three tragic poets of GREECE attained. Sentiments of greatness attributed to one hero often spoke the eulogium of another. ÆSCHYLUS, in the *Chiefs before Thebes*, says, speaking of AMPHIARUS,

To be, and not to seem, is this man's maxim:
His mind reposes on its proper wisdom,
And wants no other praise.

When these lines were repeated on the stage, the eyes of the whole assembly were involuntarily fixed on ARISTIDES, to whom this great encomium appeared most applicable; and who, in his own conduct had modelled the man upon the sentiment of the poet.

In short, the Grecian tragedies were a patriotic concern, a public benefit, a bond between men and morals; and was, therefore, sanctioned by the legislature, and maintained at the expence of the nation.

CHAP. V.

ARISTOPHANES AND MENANDER, AND THE PRO-
GRESS OF COMEDY IN GREECE.

THE real pleasure resulting from comedy, without doubt, is founded on that spurious pride which delights the human heart when human nature is humiliated. Strange paradox! Yet clear as light.

Who does not feel himself proud when the frailties of his neighbour are held up to derision? Who, that would choke with spleen at the exposition of his own folly, does not rejoice with all his soul when the follies of others are laid open to public view? Yet this ever was and is still considered as the true drift of comedy; falsely, however, for lash the manners how you may, you cannot correct them; on the contrary they will grow more callous at every stroke, and what is worse, every stroke will become more familiar and consequently more tolerable.

The fault seems to be that comedy has been given a latitude by much too extensive; and, as human frailties, up from the most pardonable folly

to the most malicious vice, are a field immeasurable; all those dramatic productions which have traversed this prodigious space, according as customs and manners have varied, according as times and circumstances have inclined the public pleasure, or policy, to tolerate them, and according to a number of other local and temporary circumstances, have been denominated comedies.

It will be no difficulty, however, even so early as when the theatre came to be regulated in GREECE, to shew that the particular province of each dramatic production was known and clearly understood; and, though in speaking of the productions of ARISTOPHANES, I shall be compelled to shew that comedy fluctuated and became irregular, it was only in conformity with those manners of which it was bound to be the faithful representative, and without which no dramatic writer can be popular.

Although all dramatic representations were confounded for a time in the word tragedy, which we have seen had not at all originally the signification which we now annex to it, nothing can be clearer than that the species of performance which the French call a *drame*, and we a play, was what the Greeks understood as the model and criterion of

their theatrical productions. The word is derived from the Greek, and signifies, literally, action, the most honourable designation of a dramatic piece, for without action it could have neither interest nor life.

Plays represent mankind in their common and natural pursuits, tragedies and comedies call them into such actions as they are not accustomed to but upon extraordinary occasions. A play has the pathetic of tragedy, and the playfulness of comedy, and is, in a general acceptance, infinitely more useful, more true, and more interesting. The end of tragedy is to make you cry, the end of comedy to make you laugh*; but a play excites both sensa-

* I have read of a poet who, describing the nature of his employment to a clown, tells him, that among other things he writes tragedies, and comedies. "What be they?" cries Clodpole. "Why works of genius," said the Poet, "one calculated to make you laugh, and the other to make you cry." "I like well enow," said the countryman, "any thing that is to make me laugh, but I can't see why a plague you should want to make me cry." "Hold your tongue," said the Poet, "let me explain myself. Tragedies, you see, are full of great heroes, who commit such glorious crimes; who talk with gods, play with lightning, get drunk with vanity, and, at last, kill themselves with an air so noble and magnificent." Here the countryman laughed with all his force. "Why what the devil do you laugh at!" said the Poet. "Laugh! why how can a body help it," said the countryman, "one may really see 'tis comical, if it be all like the sketch you gave me of it." "Pooh, pooh, be quiet," said the Poet, "you mistake the matter, tragedies are to make you cry; and then we have comedies, where we represent all

tions without violating either of them. To start an involuntary tear, as a tribute of sympathy to domestic woe, is a greater luxury than to expand a torrent of tears at the death of a heroine; and a single benevolent smile excited by a beneficent action, the result of nature and goodness, gladdens the mind more than a convulsion of laughter at the peculiarities of a fellow creature, who, though deformed in his manners, is, perhaps, perfect in his heart.

Plays then, as I shall have better opportunity to prove hereafter, are the parent stock of the drama; from which, on one side, sprung tragedy, which degenerated into bombast, and on the other side comedy, which degraded itself into buffoonery.

Comedy certainly was attempted in GREECE at the time of THESPIS, and, perhaps, earlier. PHRYNICHUS is sometimes called the Comic Poet, and there are appearances which justify this appellation. His pieces, very likely, were kind of Masques; and,

the follies and absurdities of mankind." 'Icod,' said the countryman, 'that be ferous enow, I'd forgive the folk for crying at that.' 'Why here's a strange fellow,' said the Poet, "laughs when he should cry, and cries when he should laugh." 'And here's a strange poet,' said the countryman, 'if you go to that, writes things to make people cry when they should laugh, and laugh when they should cry.'

if he was the inventor of the tetralogy, or if it was invented in his time, he, of course, wrote satire as well as tragedy, and in the original satires, which were the foundation of those comedies written by ARISTOPHANES, the names of persons were not spared*.

The satire in particular levelled at PERICLES will shew that they were not accustomed to use ceremony. CRATINAS, TELECIDES, EUPOLUS, and PLATO, all comic poets, were perpetually aiming their satirical shafts at this monarch; and as personal defects were always unmercifully turned into jest, so the head of PERICLES, which was disproportionably long, and which is, therefore, hid as much as possible in all the statues of him by an

* When ALCIBIADES was accused of having mutilated the statues of the gods, and other sacriligious crimes, the names of his accusers, among whom were DIOCLIDES and TEUCER, were made sport of from the stage, and PHRYNICHUS has this passage in one of his pieces.

Good HERMES pray beware a fall, nor break
Thy marble nose; lest some false DIOCLIDES
Once more his shafts in fatal poison drench:

MERC. I will. Nor e'er again shall that informer
TEUCER, that faithless stranger, boast from me
Rewards for perjury.

enormous Helmet, was the constant butt of their ridicule*.

Comedy, however, though it was occasionally introduced, boasted no great reputation till after tragedy had grown to perfection, and it is not an unlikely conjecture that the fiat of SOPHOCLES, which had broken the tetralogy and kept tragedy apart as a separate province, having reduced comedy to shift for itself, it, from necessity, resumed sufficient strength to go alone, for we soon after this see that it began to be exercised systematically.

Comedy having always been considered as a vehicle to hold folly up to ridicule, it took a different bent according to the spirit of the times. When the supreme power was in the people, the

* CRATINAS, in his play called *Chironos*, has this passage:

Faction received OLD TIME to her embraces;
Hence came a tyrant-spawn on earth called PERICLES,
In heaven the head-compeller.

[Alluding to JUPITER, who in HOMER, and every where else, is continually called The Cloud-compeller.]

TELECIDES has this passage:

Now in a maze of thought, he ruminates
On strange expedients, while his head depressed
With its own weight sinks on his knees: and now
From the vast caverns of his brain burst forth
Storms and fierce thunders.

poets, of course, were at full liberty to say unsparingly what they pleased, and of whom they pleased. Neither quality, office, age or sex were spared; every one was reproached by name*; and his species of comedy was called the Ancient, or the Real, because it convinced by speaking truth.

When the people began to lose their power, and their liberties were vested in fewer hands, it was no longer safe to use so bold a license. The poets, therefore, had recourse to a second distinction of comedy where the subject was real, and the cha-

* There are opinions that this gave rise to the institution of the ten judges, to whom were given the power of whipping authors, who had falsely represented the follies of their fellow citizens, and, therefore, arrogated a right to scourge others; but this does not appear to be fairly the fact. It should seem that these judges were originally appointed at the time when SOPHOCLES bore away the prize from ÆSCHYLUS: and PLUTARCH is very particular on this head. The probability is this: Arbitrators who adjudged prizes to merit there were certainly of some description or other, even as far back as THESEUS; and, perhaps, earlier. In proportion as merit became more perfect and more decided, the power of these judges increased, and the judges themselves were chosen out of more respectable tribes; till, at length, finding the comic poets so formidable, it was necessary to oppose authority to licentiousness; and, therefore, the judges were given a power to humiliate and degrade, by corporal punishment, all those who had unworthily endeavoured to humiliate and degrade innocent and inoffensive characters. A meritorious restriction; for while it encouraged the comic muse to speak plain, it prevented her from uttering falsehood.

racters were feigned ; and this was called the Middle Comedy, because, though it still contained truth, it could only wound by comparison*.

At length truth, even by comparison, suited ill with the luxury of the times, and the poets were obliged to invent both names and circumstances ; so that if an application hit ever so hard, no man was obliged to acknowledge the blow he had received ; and this sort of comedy, the whole being fictitious, was called The New. This last, however,

* The spirit, however, of the Middle Comedy did not want for boldness, as the following anecdote of PHILIPPIDES will prove. STRATOCLES, the servile and abject flatterer of DEMETRIUS, and other persons of the same description, inveighed against the dramatic writers on account of the liberties they took with their vices. These satirists avenged their cause with great spirit. STRATOCLES and the rest procured DEMETRIUS, when he visited ATHENS, to be received with the same honours as CERES and BACCHUS. They even went so far as to change the term Dionysia, or Feasts of Bacchus, to Demetria. The gods were said to have been offended at this. The veil which held the figures of DEMETRIUS and ANTIGONUS, together with JUPITER and MINERVA, was rent asunder by a sudden storm. Hemlock grew up near their altars ; and, one day when the Dionysia were to be celebrated, the procession was stopt by an excessive and unseasonable cold, which blasted the corn, the vines, and the fig trees. The comic poets immediately attacked STRATOCLES and the other flatterers. " Who was the cause," said PHILIPPIDES in one of his comedies, " that our vines were blasted by the frost, and that our sacred veil was rent asunder ? He who transferred the honour of the gods to men. It is he, not comedy, that is the ruin of the people."

ill suited the temper of the Greeks and it grew into no repute till it was received among the Romans.

ARISTOPHANES, the boldness of whose writings spared neither friend nor foe, gave to the Middle Comedy all the force of the ancient, or real. The place of his birth is contested; his enemies, of which he had deservedly a great number, represent him as a stranger; and his advocates, who were more so out of fear than love, insist that he was an Athenian. His pieces were chiefly written during the Peloponnesian war, so that he was a cotemporary of PLATO and SOCRATES. His reputation arose from his being an inveterate enemy to all those who wished to enslave their country. Though his style was by no means refined, his imagination was warm and lively, and his railery irresistably keen and cutting, which he laid on unsparingly, and with a spirit of unfeeling resolution.

ARISTOPHANES was remarkable for exposing the vices of men in power, which he did with uncommon wit and severity. CLEO was the first he attacked, for which purpose he wrote the comedy of the *Equites*. None of the actors, however, would venture to personate a man who possessed so much power. and, therefore, ARISTOPHANES determined to perform the part himself. This he did

with so much success that the Athenians obliged CLEO to give a fine of five talents to the poet*.

His comedy of *The Clouds* seems to be the most celebrated of all his works, both on account of its severity and the mischief it occasioned.

It is by many believed that ARISTOPHANES, in a great measure, occasioned the death of SOCRATES. At any rate that poet was very culpable in publicly accusing the philosopher of impiety in his comedy of *The Clouds*†. It was certainly his most

* MADAME DACIER, of whom ARISTOPHANES seems to have been a prodigious favourite, says in her preface to the translation of his works, that his ridicule of CLEO was so favourably received by the Athenians, that they cast flowers upon the head of the author and carried him through the streets with the most unbounded applause. They also, she tells us, and she seems to have taken a great deal of pains to be certain of the fact, made a decree that he should be honoured with a crown of the sacred olive tree in the citadel, as a distinction of the highest nature that could be paid to a citizen.

† MADAME DACIER translated this comedy; and, not contented with that, is said to have read it over two hundred times, and every time with fresh pleasure. SOCRATES was a man of inoffensive and irreproachable manners: he disapproved of the licentiousness of the comic poets, both in their writings and in their conduct:—For this he was thought a proper object of satire: for this ARISTOPHANES became the terror of virtue, and the idle of ATHENS and MADAME DACIER.

celebrated piece, and, therefore, it is supposed he had some strong inducement to take so much pains with it. This is said to be the history of the transaction.

ANYTUS and his party left no method untried to compass the destruction of SOCRATES. But they feared the Athenians, who loved him, would revolt at any *ouverte* measures; they, therefore, had recourse to stratagem, to execute which they employed ARISTOPHANES. This artful and habile satirist, who knew so well to apply his arguments that they never failed of their full force, undertook the task. He had long looked on the austere manners of SOCRATES as a fit subject on which to employ the gall that distilled from his pen. He accused him in the open theatre of being an eloquent seducer, who, by the charms of his language and the witchery of his arguments, was speciously capable of reconciling every possible contradiction. That, through the medium of this winning deceit, he had deluded the people and broached the most dangerous doctrines; that he despised the gods, and inspired all those who listened to him with errors, tending to produce the most serious and alarming consequences.

ARISTOPHANES played upon the subject with

the same glare of false reasoning of which he had accused SOCRATES; and, while he laboured to make it appear that another had imposed upon them, his own imposition was but too successful. The Athenians had not the smallest expectation that any one would dare to broach such bold accusations, and, therefore, at first, felt some resentment; but being naturally distrustful of all distinguished and extraordinary men, this comedy began to gain ground; and at length, for prejudice knows not where to stop, became more celebrated than any thing that had been exhibited in GREECE.

It cannot, however, but be allowed, that though all the ancients admired ARISTOPHANES for the true attic elegance of his style, and though the moderns have in this, as in other things, very often they knew not why, yielded a blind obedience to the ancients, yet it were better that ARISTOPHANES had never lived, or that he had employed his talents to worthier purposes; for, however he might have been admired by St. CHRYSOSTOM, who always laid him under his pillow when he went to bed; however SCALIGER may insist that no one ought to judge of the Attic dialect who had not ARISTOPHANES at his fingers ends; however FRISCHLIN may have entered the lists with PLUTARCH

in his defence ; however RYMER may have been enchanted with “ his strange fetches, his lucky starts, his odd inventions, his wild turns, returns and counter turns,” finishing his rhapsody by the anti-climax of comparing him to the mad RABELAIS ; and, to bring up the rear respectably, however MADAME DACIER might have affected to receive so much rapturous delight from that wit which had been the death of a man who was an honour to his country ; yet the more poignant his wit, the more brilliant his genius, and the more consummate his judgment ; his indiscriminate exercise of those talents ; his wickedly and wantonly confounding SOCRATES with CLEO, and thereby perverting the principles of morality ; his parodying SOPHOCLES and EURIPIDES, turning into ridicule the works of those admirable writers, the study of whose lives had been to make their fellow citizens honest and honourable ; and, thereby establishing, stamp with the consequence of his authority, to which the people were accustomed to look up to as a fiat, a criterion for meaner writers to ridicule every thing noble and worthy ; these, however they may establish his reputation as a writer, must destroy it as a member of society ; and, whatever opinion may be entertained of his wit, a most despicable one must be formed of his morals.

ARISTOPHANES is said to have written above fifty comedies, eleven of which are extant, and some of them are printed in different languages. MADAME DACIER, with all her admiration of him, seems to have thought only two worthy of selection, which are *Plutus*, and *The Clouds*; these she published with critical notes, and an examination of them according to the rules of the theatre.

We know nothing of when or where ARISTOPHANES died, so that all his extraordinary fortune happened to him in his life time.

After ARISTOPHANES the middle comedy gradually declined; for as the wits that came after him had not the merit to imitate him in his bold and satirical style of writing, their minor abilities naturally turned to the false and feeble parts of his works, in which he dishonoured his genius by piteous parodies of writings, infinitely more valuable to the cause of truth and literature than his own.

It was, however, the fate of GREECE that the stage should be once more rescued from barbarism. MENANDER, who was born at ATHENS, in the third year of the hundred and ninth Olympiad, introduced the new comedy, and thereby refined an

art that had been exercised for fifty years with the most unbridled profligacy and licentiousness. His incomparable merit quickly spread his name to the remotest nations. PLINY says, that the kings of EGYPT and MACEDON gave a noble proof of their admiration of him, by sending ambassadors, and even fleets, to bring him to their courts; but MENANDER was too much of a philosopher to be tempted by the promises of the great.

The time continuing, however corrupt, his countrymen denied him that merit which he was allowed by strangers, and, therefore, established, in his favour, the strongest possible proof of his superior genius. This contumely he pitied and forgave; and though, through the ignorance and partiality of the judges, he often saw the prize awarded to PHILEMON, a miserable cotemporary poet; he bore it with perfect indifference, the only notice he ever took of it being when he asked PHILEMON whether he did not blush to wear the laurel,

MENANDER is said to have written above a hundred comedies, which are all unfortunately lost. We can only come at his works, therefore, through TERENCE, who borrowed four plays from him,

though some say fix, which are allowed to have lost much of their original spirit.

We know, therefore, but little of MENANDER, but that little may serve to give an exalted idea of his reputation. He seems to have been in comedy what EURIPIDES was in tragedy. The old rhetoricians recommend his works as the true and perfect patterns of every thing beautiful and graceful in public speaking. QUINTILIAN advises an orator to seek in MENANDER for copiousness of invention, for elegance of expression, and all that universal genius which is able to accommodate itself to persons, things and affections.

MENANDER's wonderful talent of portraying nature in every condition, and under every accident of life, occasioned that memorable question of ARISTOPHANES the grammarian: "Oh MENANDER! Oh nature! which of you have copied the works of the other." OVID, and PLUTARCH, have paid the tribute of praise to his reputation, but CÆSAR, in calling TERENCE a half MENANDER, has seemed to give a critical idea of his excellence by allowing him double the merit of the Roman poet, whose extraordinary value as a writer he is recording at the minute he makes the remark.

MENANDER died in the third year of the hundred and twenty-second Olympiad ; and, after him there is nothing worthy to be related of the dramatic art in GREECE.

CHAP. VI.

ACTORS, AND THE CONCLUSION OF THE GRECIAN
THEATRE.

ACTORS were held in honourable esteem in GREECE; but this is only saying that the Greeks honoured all those whose pursuits were stimulated by any meritorious emulation.

I shall, however, premise, that the arts which flourished in perfection at ATHENS were little known or relished in SPARTA, and it cannot but be considered as remarkable, that the Greeks, who were, in fact, but one people, should be divided into two kingdoms merely from manners, habits, and modes of thinking.

This, however, taken one way, may tell to the honour of the Spartans. Their manners were so austere, and their conduct so exact, that they rejected every thing superfluous; and though amusements, poetry and music in particular, were but little encouraged among them, yet, such as they had

a taste for, consisted of pure simplicity and dignified expression. TERPANDER, who was both a poet and a musician, PINDAR and other eminent men, though not Spartans, were admired in SPARTA.

Any thing but the mere sentiment in music and poetry, and its force and influence on the mind, the Lacedemonians rejected. Even when LYCURGUS instituted the senate of thirty, including the two kings, they met in the open air, under an idea that a hall, or building of any kind, prepared for the purpose, might amuse the attention with such trifles as pictures, or statutes, and splendid ornaments, instead of occupying it on subjects relative to the general welfare.

Theatres, in like manner, were discouraged. AGESILAUS, who reigned in SPARTA forty-one years, held the theatre in contempt. One day CALLIPEDES, a celebrated Greek tragedian, approached AGESILAUS and paid his respects to him, and having waited a considerable time in expectation that some honourable notice would be taken of him, said, at last, "Do you not know me Sir?" The king looking at him with a contemptuous disdain said, "Are you not CALLIPEDES the stage player?" Another time AGESILAUS was asked to hear a

mimic who imitated the nightingale to perfection. "No," said he, "I have heard the nightingale herself."

Nay, this dislike, or rather severity of manners, extended even to their slaves. When the Thebans invaded LACONIA, they took prisoners a number of the Helotes, whom they ordered to sing the odes of TERPANDER, ALEMON, or SPENDON, the Lacedemonian; but they excused themselves, saying, that it was forbidden by their masters.*

But if the dramatic art was slighted in SPARTA, it was caressed with enthusiasm in ATHENS; and, indeed, in all the countries into which the Grecians penetrated. Every general of any eminence had in his camp his poets, his musicians, and his declaimers. In the camp of ALEXANDER, HERPHESTIAN gave to EVIUS, the musician, the quarters destined for EUMENES; who, thus affronted, complained to ALEXANDER, and said that he saw,

* PHYRNIS, the musician, added two strings to the harp, making them in all nine. These two strings were afterwards taken away, but TIMOTHEAN, the famous dithyrambic poet and musician, extended the number of strings to twelve. He was, however, severely punished by the rigid Spartans, under an idea that luxury of sound would effeminate the people.

plainly the best way to acquire promotion would be to throw away their arms and learn to play upon the flute, or turn tragedian.

Indeed, ALEXANDER, proud as he was, considered it no degradation to countenance actors, and even to place a confidence in them. Having an opinion of the wit and readiness, nay the discretion and honour of THESSALUS the actor, he sent him on an embassy to PEXODORUS, the Persian governor in CARIA, to break off a match between the eldest daughter of that chief and ARIDÆUS.

At ALEXANDER'S return to PHŒNECIA from EGYPT, the people at the sacrifices were entertained with music, and dancing; and tragedies were also performed with the greatest magnificence. Besides the persons usually chosen by lot from the tribes to conduct those exhibitions, NICOCREON, king of SALAMIS, and PASICRATES, king of SOLI, particularly distinguished themselves upon this occasion. PASICRATES risked the victory upon ATHENODORUS the actor, and NICOCREON upon THESSALUS. ALEXANDER interested himself most anxiously in behalf of the latter. He did not, however, lest the assembly should be biaſſed, declare in his favour till ATHENODORUS was proclaimed victor by all the suffrages; when he exclaimed, that he com-

mended the judges for what they had done, but that he would have given half his kingdom rather than have seen **THESSALUS** conquered.

ALEXANDER had an opportunity afterwards of shewing how unprejudiced his mind was. When the same **ATHENODORUS** was fined by the Athenians, for not making his appearance on the stage at the feasts of **BACCHUS**, he entreated **ALEXANDER** to intercede for him; who, though he did not chose to write in his favour, paid the fine.

Another time **LYCON**, the actor, a native of **SCARPHIA**, finding that his performance delighted **ALEXANDER**, insinuated adroitly in his part, that he was in necessity for ten talents. **ALEXANDER** laughed at the conceit, and ordered the actor what he so ingeniously demanded.

But the instances of admiration in which the talents and conduct of the Grecian actors were held are innumerable. We have already seen that **ÆSCHYLUS**, **SOPHOCLES**, and **EURIPIDES**, were all actors, and, indeed, so were most of the Grecian dramatic writers. Had not **ARISTOPHANES** been an excellent actor, the world would have lost the hateful character of **CLEO**.

Thus declamation at **ATHENS** was the criterion

of oratory. POLUS, an actor, had lost his only child, whom he tenderly loved, and he was on that day to perform a part which had an incident similar to his own situation. To render his grief more lively and natural, he took an urn containing the ashes of his son, which so wrought upon his feelings that he drew tears from the whole assembly.

In short, declamation was esteemed a great requisite towards obtaining a rank in public life. The first men of ATHENS did not disdain to practise it. Nevertheless actors were not permitted to judge of the merit of public entertainments.

When DEMOSTHENES complained that the worst orators were heard in the rostrum in preference to him, SATYRUS, the actor, to shew him how much, grace, dignity, and action add to the celebrity of a public man, repeated to him several passages from SOPHOCLES and EURIPIDES, with which DEMOSTHENES was so captivated that he ever afterwards modelled his eloquence from the example of the best actors*.

We have now seen that the dramatic art is traceable in GREECE to THESEUS†. That it gra-

* We shall see more of this when we get among the Romans.

† THESEUS, after he had deserted ADRIADNE, in return for

dually came forward till it was perfected by *ÆSCHYLUS*; that the admirable talents of *ÆSCHYLUS*, *SOPHOCLES*, and *EURIPIDES*, were superior, when the infancy of the drama is considered, to any triumvirate since that time; that this great compact once broken, comedy, particularly in the hands of *ARISTOPHANES*, degenerated into licentiousness; and that the incomparable talents of *MENANDER* came too late to save the sinking interest of the stage.

It remains now only to say, that from the parodies of the tragic writers, began by *ARISTOPHANES*, and awkwardly imitated by his cotemporaries and successors, sprung mimes, farces, and the grossest buffoonery*; and, though the Grecian theatre still

her having given him the clue to the labyrinth of *CRETE*, by which means he conquered the Minotaur, put in at *DELOS*, where he sacrificed to *APOLLO*, first having dedicated a statue of *VENUS*, which he had received as a present from *ARIADNE*. This ceremony, or dance, by various involutions and evolutions, resembled the labyrinth, and was, therefore, called the Crane, in imitation of that bird, which, in its flight always takes a circular direction. *THESEUS* is said to have been so pleased with it, that he instituted games at *DELOS*, where began the custom of giving a palm to the victor.

* When the Athenian theatre, by the introduction of puerilities, lost its honour, it lost its consequence, and degenerated in credit as it degenerated in virtue. What then shall we say when we consider that the same abuses which procured the disgrace of the Grecian stage, should ensure the reputation of the English.

kept up an appearance of greatness, and there was often some brilliancy beamed across the heterogeneous mass which obscured that truth and nature to which the people were no longer sensible; yet the grandeur and magnificence of public exhibitions, visibly decreased; till, at length, the fate of the stage too truly foretold the fate of the empire. So certain it is that where the arts are redundant they introduce luxury, and sap the foundation of a state.

CHAP. VII.

 ROMAN THEATRE,
 FROM ITS ORIGIN TO THE TIME OF LIVIUS AN-
 DRONICUS.

WHAT nature was to the Greeks the Greeks were to the Romans*, and the resemblance is remarkably perfect; for, as the Greeks attained a splendid degree of perfection by a close imitation of nature, the Romans never arrived to any distinguished perfection because they imitated man. But, indeed, in greatness of soul and strength of mind they were in every thing infinitely below the Greeks. A people whose luxury was to enjoy a spectacle of gladiators were little calculated to listen to lectures of

* It is remarkable, but by no means astonishing, that the same may be said of all nations, in proportion as civilization extended itself; for we may go on and say that what the Greeks were to the French, the French were to us. It does not, however, follow that the dramatic art has gradually declined since the time of the Greeks; for the French improved upon the Romans, and we have, in great measure, improved upon the French; but it follows, nevertheless, that if *ÆSCHYLUS*, *SOPHOCLES*, *EURIPIDES*, and *MENANDER*, had never been born, the theatre might at this moment have retained its original barbarity.

truth and morality. The ferocious Romans were always rather terrible than great ; and the mind accommodates itself ill to a belief that the same men could attend with any degree of pleasure, or interest, to whatever inculcated the mild duties of clemency and beneficence ; who, in cold blood, could murder their defenceless sovereign at the foot of the capitol.

All writers agree that the Romans arrived to no degree of perfection in either literature or the arts, and, in particular, the stage, but as they copied the Greeks, and that even of the stage, their copies are faint indeed. The pompous and phlegmatic *SENECA*, falsely called the Tragic Poet, with his fettered and dependant style, lagged far behind the Greek triumvirate. The cold *TERENCE*, though full of nature and grace, imprinted nothing on the mind congenial to the Roman character. The subjects were Greek, but they were enfeebled and spiritless ; and only served to excite regret in those who knew how to taste the muse of *MENANDER*.

The Romans were nearly four hundred years without any scenic representations ; but it is not to be supposed that they were so long without any sort of poetry, or that some self-born amusement did not manifest itself with them as it did with the Greeks ;

on the contrary monsters of this description were born and nursed by feasts and debauches. Their first poetry, which was called *Saturnine* and *Fescinnine*, was hard and crude, resembling rather prose in cadence than measured verse. In other respects it was full of gross raillery, and sung by persons who accompanied it with gestures and postures the most indecent and lascivious.

This barbarous stuff gave place to raillery more refined; but which, however, became so severe and sarcastic, that those at whom it was levelled, not liking these sort of jests, retorted the kindness manually; till, at length, it caused so much mischief that a law was made which condemned to death any person who in their verses should wound the reputation of his neighbour. This law was made in the three hundred and second year of ROME; a certain proof that this licentiousness had obtained and that they had grown sufficiently civilized at that time to suppress it.

This reform lasted a hundred years, at the end of which time a public calamity induced them to seize every opportunity to appease the anger of Heaven; and thus feasts in honour of the gods became, after a time, theatrical performances.

These were, however, according to TITUS LIVY, irregular sketches made up wholly of imitation. BALADINES, who came from TUSCANY, danced to the sound of the flute, and exhibited a number of rude gestures and attitudes in the manner of that country. This amusement was received with the warmest applause, and after repeated trials and improvements it became more endurable. Regular troops named Histrions, because in the Tuscan language a baladine is called Hister, performed complete pieces entitled *Satires*, in which the actors and the spectators joined promiscuously.

These kind of farces continued about a hundred and twenty years; when the poet ANDRONICUS, about the time ARATUS called in ATIGONOUS from MACEDONIA, which proved the ruin of GREECE, about two hundred and forty years after the death of ÆSCHYLUS, and about a hundred and eighty years after the death of SOPHOCLES and EURIPIDES, brought forward the first perfect dramatic piece in Rome.

CHAP. VIII.

LIVIVS ANDRONICUS, PACUVIVS, ACCIVS*, AND
SENECA, AND THE PROGRESS OF TRAGEDY IN
ROME.

ANDRONICUS, surnamed LIVIVS, because he obtained his freedom through LIVIVS SALINATOR, to whose children he was preceptor, was a native of GREECE. It is said, that despairing of any improvement in the Roman Theatre, he sung his pieces in the manner of his predecessors; but one day as he was surrounded by the populace, being extremely fatigued, he called in the assistance of a slave, who relieved him while he fetched breath. The slave, however, not acquitting himself to the satisfaction of his master, he expostulated with him; upon this the spectators, supposing their altercation to be a part of the piece, were so entertained with it that from thence dialogue was adopted.

* LIVIVS ANDRONICUS, PACUVIVS, and ACCIVS, were the earliest poets in ROME. HORACE gives to LIVIVS the reputation of invention, to PACUVIVS the merit of regularity, and to ACCIVS the advantage of sublimity.

It is much more probable that being himself a Greek, and having escaped from the wreck of the Grecian theatre, LIVIUS bore away with him such part of its treasure as the storm had spared; and, as a fit opportunity for his purpose occurred at the end of the first Punic war, when the Temple of JANUS was shut for the second time since the foundation of ROME, and when the Romans were in friendship with all the world, he took his measures; and, in pity to the wretched state of their drama, ventured to innovate upon a more rational taste.

This he did to so good a purpose, that, certainly, for a time, the Romans rejected all their former rude and impure dramatic customs; and, under the tuition of ANDRONICUS, determined to regulate their taste on the Grecian model; indeed it will be difficult to controvert; that through ANDRONICUS and ENNIUS, whom SUTTONIUS tells us were half Greeks, the cause of literature at this favourable period became completely established.

Whatever the merit of ANDRONICUS might have been, except giving to Roman taste Grecian refinement, is very uncertain. He is spoken of in general only collaterally; and but for ENNIUS, with whom he is often coupled, and who, some tragedies translated from the Greek excepted, has no

right to be considered as a dramatic poet, we should know very little about his particular talents. 'Tis certain, however, that ANDRONICUS turned the tide of opinion for a time, but the Romans, ever changeable, at last grew tired of tragedy; which, having for some time undergone a suspension, was at last restored by PACUVIUS.

It is not exactly ascertained when PACUVIUS was born, but he flourished, as a tragic poet in ROME, about sixty years after ANDRONICUS first began to be known; and, if it be true, what some contend, tragedy had still a smack of its parent stock, for he is said to have been the grandson of ENNIUS.

PACUVIUS, however, though he restored tragedy, as far as the fluctuating manners of the Romans would admit, certainly did little more, for we know of nothing he produced of any celebrity; and, though he successfully kept the Grecian taste afloat, and thus regulated the wild and extravagant follies, which, in spite of the best care pervaded the Roman spectacles; yet, Accius seems to have reaped that harvest of reputation which ANDRONICUS and PACUVIUS had so carefully-sown*.

* PACUVIUS was properly by profession a painter; and we are informed that his productions, in this way, had considerable merit.

ACCIIUS was born in the five hundred and eighty-third year of ROME. He became a sort of disciple of PACUVIUS, who brought his last piece on the stage in the very year that Accius produced his first. By the advice of PACUVIUS he kept to those subjects which had been already brought forward on the Athenian stage. Not that he confined himself entirely to these, for he wrote one piece, the story of which was Roman, and it related to the expulsion of the Tarquins. It was called *Brutus*. We are also informed that he wrote comedies, but we know nothing of their titles.

What, however, seems to have given ACCIUS more reputation and consequence than any thing else, was the verses he wrote in praise of DECIMUS BRUTUS, who was honoured with a triumph for his victories in SPAIN; and, who was so charmed upon this occasion with ACCIUS, that he had the verses inscribed at the entrances of those temples which he caused to be erected out of the spoils of the vanquished; and thus we have BRUTUS's word, so flattered, that ACCIUS was an excellent poet.

As Accius passed through Tarentum, in his way

PLINY tells us in particular that he painted the entire decorations of a Temple of HERCULES in a masterly manner. It is still possible that he might being an active dramatic writer.

to Asia, he paid a visit to PACUVIUS, and read to him his tragedy of *Atreus*, which, by the advice of his old master, he had copied from the Greek. PACUVIUS told him that his style was elevated, but that it was rude. "I don't blush at that," said ACCIUS, "it will teach me to write better hereafter; for it is with genius as it is with fruit. Apples that are at first sour become sweet as they ripen, while those which are unseasonably soft and discoloured rot before they come to maturity."

Certainly ACCIUS has been censured for writing harsh and crude, but in other respects he was allowed to have had considerable merit. He was held in such respect that an actor was punished for only mentioning his name on the stage, and VALERIUS MAXIMUS tells us, that when JULIUS CÆSAR entered the assembly of poets ACCIUS never paid him the homage of rising to receive him; not that he meant to fail in respect, but because he considered that the superiority lay on the side of literature; and because, in such an assembly, the question was not whose title was the most illustrious but who was the best writer.

ACCIUS was asked why he who knew so well how to enforce sentiment and eloquence in his tragedies did not plead. "Because," said he, "at

the theatre I make them say what I please, at the bar my adversaries would say what I should dislike."

I shall sum up PACUVIUS and ACCIUS in the words of QUINTILIAN; who says that those illustrious authors united in their tragedies, greatness of thought, and energy of style; and, for the rest, if they have not expanded more grace through their works, and carried them to a higher degree of perfection, the fault was in the time when they wrote and not in them.

It is not at this moment decided whether the best Roman tragedies, which are attributed to an author of the name of SENECA, are written by SENECA, the philosopher, or him, who for distinction, is called SENECA the Tragic Poet. JUSTUS LIPSIUS, and ERASMUS, give it in favour of the philosopher. ENNIUS, however, insists that he wrote only the first four, his brother, the tragic poet, three, and that the other three are written by three different authors; but this dispute has given rise to a hundred conjectures, till, at length, gathering as it has gone, FATHER BRUMOY will have it that neither of the SENECAS had any hand in these pieces, but that they were written by an anonymous author, who concealed his own name to substitute one much more celebrated in literature.

The probability is, that they had both a concern in them. All the biographers of *SENECA*, the philosopher, agree that he wrote four tragedies; these his brother might have fathered, and he might also have been assisted in the composition of the rest; but the other, being occupied in studies of a more sublime nature, he might have conceived it improper to enter the lists on a subject that would not only have enticed him from his other pursuits, but have involved him in inconvenient controversies.

Leaving this point, however, as it ever will remain undecided, let us examine the tragedies them selves; which, though they were in places heavy, turgid, and inflated, have many true beauties; proving that if taste was sacrificed in them, it was as in others, a sacrifice to the times.

NERO, whose ridiculous pretensions to works of merit, were as vain as his genius was contemptible, gave a monstrous and fantastic air to all objects around him. The poets took the same tone, and *SENECA* was obliged to conform. Again. The extravagance and false dignity with which pieces were at that time represented to impose upon the people. The subject was always taken from religion; gods were brought on the stage; and it was

impossible to insert too much bombast in their expressions. The eclat introduced into the music of the chorus, the marvellous magnificence of the scenes, all, to be of a piece, went prodigiously beyond nature.

It was necessary in every way to strike the public with astonishment. In proportion as the theatres were enlarged, so they enlarged the figures of the actors. They walked upon stilts, they used a porte-voice, and covered their faces with masques which resembled those characters they represented. All this was necessary to delude a nation who panted to turn now and then from the horrible pictures presented every day to their sight by that unnatural and insatiable monster their sovereign; who not content with destroying an infinite number of the most illustrious citizens of ROME, conniving at poisoning his father, attempting to drown his mother, and assassinating his wife and his brother, to heap up the measure of his abominable crimes, sacrificed the very man whom he had compelled to throw this veil over the eyes of his subjects, that they might be diverted from the just and equitable revenge which at length, to save their sinking honour, became the reward of his ignorant pride, his despicable cowardice, and his diabolical cruelty.

NERO incorporated the natural cruelty of his character with the artificial subjects on the stage. If a poet would write a piece to please him it was impossible to shed too much blood. This monstrous mixture of barbarity and love for theatrical representations carried him to the most extravagant lengths. He instituted the feasts Juvenalia, which were celebrated in honour of his mother, at the very moment that he meditated her destruction. The pomp introduced in these is inconceivable. Nothing could go beyond the parade except the vanity with which he exposed his incorrigible folly. Among the rest he offered the produce of his chin, when he was shaved for the first time, to JUPITER CAPITOLINUS. He obliged persons of the first distinction to perform different parts. He himself sung the fable of *Atis*, and the *Bacchantes*, while BURRHUS and SENECA were commanded to excite the spectators to applaud.

SUETONIUS informs, us, that when NERO performed on the stage, he filled his hair with golden powder to resemble APOLLO; and while he sung and accompanied himself with the lyre, the soldiers with the point of the sword extorted applause from the people.

All this serves to induce a belief, that however, the stoical austerity and gravity of SENECA might

incline him to be silent as to the hand he had in those tragedies, they were either written or connived at by him; and that whatever there is amiss in them he was compelled to admit, and whatever excellent sprung from his own genius.

It must be allowed that they contained, in places, some most admirable morality. In the choruses, in particular, there are brilliant sentences, filled with superb images, and expressed in beautiful verse. Upon the whole, though taken altogether, they cannot serve as patterns for dramatic writing; though the admirers of the great stoic philosopher, may feel there being attributed to him as degrading to the memory of their favourite; yet, with all their faults, and with all his high reputation, they contain, clogged, perhaps, and fettered with unworthy and disgraceful passages impelled by the glare of a tyrant's falchion, sentiments which might legitimately emanate from the soul of *SENECA*.

There were other tragic poets among the Romans, but we know very little of them. *MARCUS ATTILIUS* wrote tragedies, but his style was barbarous, for so *CICERO* tells us, and *LUCINIUS* calls him the Iron Poet.

PUBLIUS POMPONIUS, who was the relation and intimate friend of *PLINY*, wrote tragedies at

the time of the emperor CLAUDIUS who very much admired them. PUBLIUS seems to have written with a more independant spirit than SENECA; for, FABIVS says, that being desired by the emperor to take certain passages out of his pieces, he answered, "I shall appeal to the people." He was not less distinguished in the army than on the theatre; for TACITUS tells us, that he was once rewarded with the honour of a triumph.

SULPITIUS is spoken of as an author of merit. CICERO calls him the tragic orator. STRABO speaks of DIODORUS of Alexandria, who acquired considerable reputation in his tragedies. ATHENÆUS tells us of LEONTINE, OVID of TURANIUS, ACRON of ARISTIUS FUSCUS, and PROPERTIUS of PONTICUS; but, indeed, there was scarcely an eminent man among the Romans but had something to do with the theatre. The ancient grammarians have given an account of the *Thyestus* of GRACCHUS, the *Alcmeon* of CATULLUS, the *Adrastus* of CÆSAR, the *Ajax* of AUGUSTUS, the *Octavio* of MÆCENAS, and the *Medea* of OVID; but they say that these tragedies are all lost, and that the loss is not worthy to be regretted.

CHAP. IX.

 PLAUTUS AND TERENCE, AND THE PROGRESS OF
 COMEDY IN ROME.

TO this moment, perhaps, comedy has not been critically defined. It is not the ancient, or the comedy of PHRYNICHUS and his followers, because there is something shockingly revolting in holding up men by their names and proclaiming their vices and follies to the world, and comedy ought not to revolt an audience. It is not the middle, or the comedy of ARISTOPHANES and his followers, because, though the man is not named, if he be not so represented as to be known to all the world, the audience cannot be satisfied; if he be so known, they must be shocked on the side of humanity, and comedy ought not to excite either of these consequences. It cannot be the new, or the comedy of MENANDER and his followers, because, though in this species of comedy both names and circumstances are feigned, yet the licence is so wide and diffusive, that there is scarcely any province in the

whole circle of the drama that it might not embrace, and comedy should neither soar nor degenerate.

Comedy appears then to be the essence of MENANDER'S plan applied by an ingenious poet to manners, time, and place ; and so managed as to represent common life so exact, so animated, and so faithful, that the author, the actors, and the spectators, may go away satisfied with one another. Not a portrait, but a picture ; not the likeness of an individual, but a resemblance of the whole audience ; nay, of the whole world, of human nature. Every thing above this trenches upon tragedy, every thing below it sinks into farce.

Merely to laugh and to cry, is to indulge two emotions of the mind derived from the same origin, and which have so very little to do with the heart that one is not always a sign of joy, nor the other of grief. When I see a character put into all situations but those which are natural to it, I think of a groom exercising a managed horse ; and after becoming fatigued with his bounds, his leaps, and his caprioles, I long to see him walk. In short let no poet expect to produce a real comedy who cannot excite every emotion of the soul without unworthily

surprising the heart, or reproaching the understanding.

If this be any thing like the true definition of comedy, we must despair of finding it in any repute among the Romans ; for *TERENCE* came very far short of it in one respect, and *PLAUTUS* went very far beyond it in the other ; and as to any comic writers but those, what did they produce but pityful farce, and contemptible buffoonery.

Comedy, in *ROME*, did not establish itself systematically and by degrees as it did in *GREECE* ; for *PLAUTUS* wrote for the theatre during the time of *LIVIVS ANDRONICUS*, and *TERENCE*, who was nine years old when *PLAUTUS* died, must of course have been cotemporary with *PACUVIVS* and *Accius* ; so that every thing serious and comic, good and bad, came at once ; and so it was but Grecian, found a kind welcome among the Romans. On this account their theatre adopted indiscriminately every species of dramatic amusement, from the loftiest tragedy to the most miserable farce, and that which was absurdest was the most admired.

Had the taste of the Romans admitted of regularity, *PLAUTUS* and *TERENCE* might certainly

have gone a great way towards establishing a criterion for comedy; but PLAUTUS, in compliance with the times, prostituted that real wit which he certainly possessed, and which, properly and resolutely exercised, might have shamed the people out of those monstrous satires and gross farces, which disgraced the stage; and TERENCE, determined upon a reform, went to the other extreme and exhibited, as an object of public admiration, a muse, correct indeed, in perfect proportion, measured and compassed to a nicety; but which wanted warmth, animation, and spirit; serious without interest, good without a motive, and virtuous without inducement.

It was said that the impures of TERENCE spoke more modestly than the honest women of PLAUTUS; therefore both were out of place. It must be allowed, however, that the praise of the candid and the sensible is eminently due to both these poets; but the manners were too corrupt for any reasonable hope of reformation. The task was Herculean; and if ARISTOPHANES, who laid about him soundly, sparing neither friend nor foe, could work no reform in polished GREECE, but on the contrary much mischief, how should PLAUTUS, without the same club, or the strength to wield it, expect a reform in barbarous ROME; and if MENANDER, with the

grace of eloquence, the purity of reason, and the beauty of truth, could make no impression on recreant minds, once accustomed to love virtue, how should TERENCE hope that cions from these exotics, which had drooped and died at home, should flourish into strength and beauty in an uncongenial soil.

PLAUTUS has been warmly praised and severely censured. VARRO says, that if the Muses were to speak Latin they would certainly speak in the language of PLAUTUS *. It is the opinion of CICERO, GELLIUS, MACROBIUS, LIPSIUS, and others, that his genuine ridicule, the truth of his characters, the pleasantry and poignancy of his wit, and the force of his satire, have set him far beyond all the other Roman comic writers. On the contrary, another troop of critics, headed by HORACE, censure his wit in the severest terms, as unintelligible, gross, obscene, and void of that beauty and truth so essential in the composition of comedy.

* This is a trite idea and has been twenty times applied, and in particular by SOCRATES, who said, and I own the resemblance seems to be more perfect, that if JUPITER condescended to speak like man he would speak the language of PLATO; but as to the Muses VARRO, speaking of PLAUTUS, pays no great compliment to those ladies when we recollect what we were told just now of the language of his modest women.

PLAUTUS, not being able to do what he wished, did what he could. 'Tis a constant, but lamentable excuse, to say all this must be done to comply with the taste of the times. In this case an author does not write for the instruction of the world, the world instruct him what to write. PLAUTUS thus tired out, very soon, by the bye, of instructing others, was willing enough to take these instructions himself, preferring profit to fame; for which poetic sin he is said to have been severely punished; for, being a covetous man, after he had amassed a fortune by his works, he became a bankrupt, and worked as a journeyman miller to procure himself a subsistence.

As to *TERENCE*, though *PLAUTUS* had certainly a stronger genius, and a more fervid imagination, he will long continue to live in the knowledge and estimation of all nations with a certain and decided reputation; and yet it is a reputation that does not excite much envy. It is in vain to deny that without *MENANDER* there could have been no *TERENCE*; but yet *MENANDER* having written plays on a plan which exposed vice without exposing individuals, having attempted to simplify comedy in *GREECE* as *ÆSCHYLUS* had simplified tragedy; the good sense of *TERENCE* in preserving this treasure which he had the fortune to find, and the modesty to give to the world as free from alloy as possible,

cannot be enough commended; and it is not because he has laboured to transmit to posterity the reputation of MENANDER that we must deny reputation to him.

It is said, that though HOMER ought most to be admired, VIRGIL ought most to be copied, for, though VIRGIL is an imitator of HOMER, yet the style of VIRGIL will ever beget him a higher degree of literary reputation; and yet who would not, after all this, rather be HOMER than VIRGIL? And so of TERENCE; his dialogue is full of beauty, polish, and regularity; his characters are natural, exact, and finished; and his conduct chaste, proper, and decorous; but he has no variety, his plots have a tiresome sameness, and his scene and his characters have nothing to do with one another; all which forces his very admirers to remark that he is only perfect as far as he goes. The fact is, that every thing in TERENCE is Greek except the language.

On the other hand, as TERENCE was not original like MENANDER, and had not the genius, the wit, and the fire of MENANDER, though his style, and the merit of having conveyed the resemblance of that admirable poet to posterity, will be gratefully acknowledged by every admirer of diligent industry; yet I would rather be MENANDER with all his

obligations to TERENCE, than TERENCE with all his obligations to MENANDER.

The distinction between PLAUTUS and TERENCE seems to be this. PLAUTUS gave an unbridled licence to his wit, TERENCE curbed his too tightly; censurable this in either case. CÆSAR wishes that TERENCE had possessed the *vis comica* of PLAUTUS, and yet he acknowledges that it was indelicate and coarse. QUINTILIAN, PATERCULLUS, and others of the ancients have wished PLAUTUS to have had the urbanity and purity of TERENCE, which ERASMUS says may be considered as a criterion of the Latin language, and yet this urbanity is allowed to be cold and tame.

Both English and French critics, supporting their opinions by ancient authorities, have written as oppositely on this subject as frost is to fire; some maintaining that PLAUTUS is neglected, for that he possessed every necessary requisite of a first rate dramatic genius; others that he is a miserable farce-writer, and beneath contempt or criticism; and, as to TERENCE, scarcely have you shut up one authority by which you learn that no true beauty or refined elegance can go beyond him, but you open another where he is said to have been so dull, that

there are but two passages in his six plays that stand the smallest chance of provoking a smile.

Justice, therefore, I think, will take a middle course, and incline us to believe that though the reputation of PLAUTUS and TERENCE, as imitators of ARISTOPHANES and MENANDER, may admit of a considerable deduction; yet had they not been fettered by the false taste of that country in which they wrote, and which would admit of no innovation but what was Greek, they might, from their own intrinsic merit, have established a much more brilliant reputation.

CHAP. X.

FARCES, PANTOMIMES, AND OBSERVATIONS.

OF ROME, where the dramatic art did not come forward in its natural gradation, but where a taste for tragedy, comedy, farce, pantomime, satire, masque, tragic-comedy, and every thing regular and irregular prevailed, just as whim or caprice governed the moment, it is difficult to give a digested account of the stage.

We have seen that gross satires and buffoonery originally prevailed, and that these satires and this buffoonery were born from drunken feasts, and, therefore, full of indecency and licentiousness; and that after a time they assumed the form of invectives of a most vehement kind against the supposed vices of particular persons. In this state we have seen them prohibited; but their spirit, however, was never lost, for in proportion as they were admitted by different legislators, so they were, at different

times, the leading favourites of the people *, to the rejection, at intervals, of the works of those poets who had, as we have seen, laboured with so much industry, and to so little purpose to amend a bad taste.

Pantomimes were also, at times, prodigiously followed. These flourished in ROME during the reign of AUGUSTUS. Some say they originated at that time, but this is not the truth; for there can be no doubt but they were antecedent even to the

* It will be here material to notice that the satires of the Greeks differed essentially from those of the Romans, though both may be denominated farce; a species of dramatic entertainment no doubt antecedent to all others. The satires, or farces, of the Greeks, were little pieces admitting of either tragic or comic subjects treated in the way of burlesque. Those of the Romans were poems mingled with bitter invectives against vice. The objection against both is that they were impure and indecent to a monstrous degree; for while the Grecians, to relieve their tragedies, than which nothing can be more chaste and pure, introduced mobs of drunken satyrs, whence the title of these pieces, the Romans exposed, without mincing the matter, by lascivious and obscene descriptions and attitudes, those vices they affected to hold up to public scorn; nay we are told, by way of a very curious remedy against vice, which to a degree horrid and complicate no people ever encouraged so much as the Romans, that actresses were exposed naked, after the piece was over, to do away any impression the Roman youths might have received from those charms which had been veiled from their sight.

Grecian Chorus *. They were introduced at Rome by PYLADES and BATHYLLUS. PYLADES was celebrated for serious subjects, and BATHYLLUS for comic.

What we are told of these pantomimes is beyond measure astonishing. SENECA confesses he had a real taste and passion for them. LUCIAN tells us, that though mute and unassisted by either poetry or music, they were as affecting as the tragedies and comedies of their best writers; but as pantomimes, the only part of the drama in which the Romans improved on the Greeks, were the last and most serious innovation, and as they led to all those factions and dissensions, struggling with which the theatre received its death wound, they shall rest till we have seen in what manner poor tragedy and comedy were tossed about in that agitated sea of swelling, broken, and jarring interests, the Roman theatre.

Soon after regular pieces were introduced, satires were neglected, and continued to be so during the time the poets themselves performed in their

* It will be proved in its place that not only pantomime is more than three thousand years old, indeed one instance has already been given in THESEUS's dance of *The Crane*, but that opera, which is supposed to have had existence only two hundred years, is an improvement of the ancient chorus.

own dramas. But the youths of ROME, tired of tragedies, at length took possession of the theatre, where they performed satires by way of interlude, in the place of the chorus. To conciliate also the suffrages of the Romans for this innovation on dramatic regularity, they produced pieces in imitation of the Greek satires, which were partly serious and partly comic.

To such a pitch was this carried, that the common people, who relished nothing but grossness and buffoonery, in the midst of the regular performances were continually calling for athletic feats, tumbling, and bear dancing. One of the comedies of *TERENCE* is said to have been thus interrupted several times during the two first representations, and the performers were obliged to quit the theatre, to make place for rope-dancers and gladiators; for, had this not been complied with, a further representation of the comedy would never have been permitted*.

* *VOLTAIRE* says that in England every thing is mob. That so we are entertained with bull baiting, cock fighting, or boxing, we are content to put up with the most miserable outrages on good sense and probability in our theatres. When he says this, he is speaking of *Hamlet*, and ridiculing the jesting of the grave-diggers in what he calls the *church yard of the king's palace*. What must he have said had he spoken of the Roman mob, who preferred *dancing bears* to the elegant and regular *TERENCE*.

The tragi-comedies, however, in a great measure reconciled this; and as the performers were freed men, the citizens considered them in as respectable a light as the poets. Thus an amnesty was at length agreed on, the chorus was permitted in its place, and they were contented to perform the satires by way of after-pieces.

Before the time of *Scipio*, the African—who some believe to have had a hand, together with *Lælius* his friend, in the comedies of *Terence*—the senators and the Roman knights assisted at the spectacles promiscuously with the plebeians: the only distinction paid to the patricians was, the plebeians were obliged to find every thing in preparation for them. Afterwards, however, there was a considerable difference made between them, and it was from this time that the theatres grew into regularity, which ended in the building of amphitheatres in a style prodigiously large and astonishingly magnificent. In the amphitheatre built by *Julius Cæsar* we are told that a hundred thousand persons could be commodiously seated. In these buildings were placed orchestras where the senators sat; and, in a distinguished eminence, the emperor and his family: the patricians had also places set apart for them, and the plebeians occupied the remaining space.

AUGUSTUS added a superb covering of purple to the theatre for the convenience of the spectators: he also built porticos; and finding that JULIUS CÆSAR had lost some of his popularity by not paying that attention to their amusement expected by the public, he himself made it his study to apply very closely to whatever could engage their interest through the medium of promoting their pleasures. He was very exact in his attendance at the theatre; and when indisposition, or affairs of state prevented his personal appearance, he never failed to send some of his family to represent him and make his excuses to the people. In this manner, mingling policy with their enjoyments, he insinuated himself with greater certainty into their affections, and carried all his points so well by this ingenious and sensible conduct, that he never found it difficult to broach measures which, had they been introduced in a mode less enticing, might have been considered as dangerous novelties*.

The Romans had in their entertainments the most superb machines, in some of which chariots traversed the theatre; in others gods descended

* Being one day told of this, AUGUSTUS answered, 'it is right to administer to the people's folly that their attention may be diverted from things of consequence.'

through the roof; and a third sort were so constructed so as to support characters which appeared to be flying. On these they ventured so much at hazard, that many dreadful accidents befel them. We are told in SÜETONIUS that an actor who was performing the part of *Icarus*, in the presence of NERO, so exerted himself that though he fabled the character, he realised the catastrophe; for falling from a prodigious height, he was dashed to pieces, and the emperor was covered with his blood*.

Among the Romans it was very frequently the custom for two actors to perform the same part in conjunction, that is to say, one spoke and another acted. The following circumstance is said to have given rise to it.

LIVIVS ANDRONICUS, who has been already mentioned as the first regular poet, and who performed in his own pieces, gave the audience such satisfaction that they frequently obliged him to repeat the most pleasing passages. One day he was encored so often that, by mere dint of exertion, he became extremely hoarse. Rather than fail of their

* To give at once an idea of the incredible magnificence of the Roman stage. The scene alone in the theatre of MARCUS SCAVRUS was ornamented with three hundred and sixty columns and three thousand statues.

entertainment, the audience made another actor recite the words, and entreated ANDRONICUS to supply the action. This he did so much to their content, that they immediately adopted this mode as an improvement on their former plan; for, having now nothing to attend to but the action, they found that the performer was much more animated; which, it will be seen, was extremely necessary when we consider how vast their theatres were, that they performed in masks, and that the movement of their mouths and muscles could not be so accurately distinguished as to ascertain whether they spoke or not.

When this custom came to be more perfect, a singer was chosen whose voice had the nearest resemblance to that of the actor. This singer was placed in a convenient situation towards the back of the stage. He always spoke in a certain measure regulated upon fixed musical principles, which measure also regulated the gesticulation and deportment of the actor. In addition to this, when several performers sung together, a man with iron shoes beat time with his feet, which could not fail to be heard by all those who bore a part.

This extravagant propensity for action introduced, as we have seen, pantomimes. These were found, however, alarming and dangerous. The ex-

treme passion the people had for these sort of entertainments gave rise to cabals, and cabals begat factions. They even wore uniforms to distinguish the different species of pantomime each espoused in imitation of those who conducted the race-chariots at the *CIRCUS*. They called themselves the *blues* and the *greens*; and, at length, these factions excited the most dangerous tumults.

CHAP. XI.

ACTORS, AND THE CONCLUSION OF THE ROMAN
THEATRE.

THE manner in which the Romans paid attention to any thing was of so rude a kind, that the compliment was seldom either an honour, or an advantage; whereas the Greeks knew how to render a distinction more welcome by the mode of conferring it. It is on this account, perhaps, we have been told that the profession of an actor was disreputable at ROME, though honourable in GREECE*, for there is nothing else that seems to lend probability to this report.

The actors in ROME were freed men, and enjoyed all the immunities of other citizens; but there were two circumstances which seemed to place them differently in rank to the actors in GREECE. In GREECE, the best authors were the best actors,

* A French author, speaking of this circumstance, says, that, in regard to actors, FRANCE imitates both GREECE and ROME; for that the French consider actors after the manner of the Romans, and live among them after the manner of the Greeks.

and they were besides, as we have seen, very honourably employed; whereas few of the Roman authors were actors; and, except in one or two instances, nothing can be said of their rank, for PLAUTUS was a miller's man, and TERENCE was a slave*. The other circumstance is, that though men of high rank and considerable employment, from ediles to emperors, were actors, yet they were not professionally so, but in the nature of amateurs; and on this account they could not have kept up their distinction off the stage had they not affected to look down on those, without whose assistance they would have cut a despicable figure on it.

Thus acting in ROME was a profession by itself; and it is on this account, probably, it grew into such astonishing repute. In GREECE it was no uncommon thing for authors to teach actors their manner; to note, measure, and point the cadence, that the actors might be tutored into reciting and singing, as regularly as boys are in a cathedral. In ROME

* This is no deduction from their merit, but rather an honourable tribute to it. It is only mentioned here to shew that men of genius in society are caressed from appearance only, just as a book is estimated by the gaudiness of its binding. The mind of the man, and the contents of the book being considered as matters of no consequence.

all this was unnecessary; actors, as to representation, could teach authors.

What astonishing things we are told of *Æsop* and *Roscius*, who were preceptors in eloquence, *Æsop* in particular, to *Cicero*. The action of this great man, like that of *Demosthenes*, was defective, till with unwearied attention he had studied under these actors; from whom he imbibed such commanding powers of attracting and persuading his hearers by the force of his gesture, the modulation of his voice, and the grace of his action, as to be acknowledged the greatest orator of antiquity*.

Æsop performed tragedy, and *Roscius* comedy; therefore, just as we say tragedy and comedy, or *Greece* and *Rome*, giving the ancient title the first distinction, so we say *Æsop* and *Roscius*, but there can be no doubt but *Roscius* had more universal merit than *Æsop*. Of this his rendering *Cicero's* oration not only perfectly intelligible

* There cannot be a doubt but *Æsop* and *Roscius* in their instructions to *Cicero*, laid the foundation of all those extraneous and sportive fallies of humour, through which, at this moment, the lives and property of individuals are eloquently jested away, for it must be allowed that there was much stage wit, and many clap-traps in the oratory of *Cicero*.

but greatly interesting by gesture alone is a most astonishing proof. His judgment is spoken of in terms of wonder. He taught acting to all ranks, by which he amassed prodigious riches, and never failed at first sight to predict the degree of progress his scholar would make. He had such strength of mind, and such acute perception, that he penetrated the very recesses of the heart. No wonder such a man should command the passions of his audience*.

ROSCIUS certainly was immensely rich. His salary was equal to three thousand pounds a year; and as he performed very late in life, as he made incredible sums by teaching, and as he had led a pretty regular life, a few freaks with SYLLA and others excepted, by which he was rather likely to gain than to lose, by the time he arrived to eighty-one, at which age he died, he must have realized a monstrous sum.

All the great men, who were cotemporary with ROSCIUS and survived him, pay the most enthusiastic tributes of love and esteem to his memory. CICERO regreted him most fervently. "Where,"

* ROSCIUS seems, in his way, to have been a LAVATER, yet so good an actor that had he assumed in LAVATER's presence a character totally different from his own, he would certainly have created a blemish in the infallibility of the physiognomist.

said he, in one of his most celebrated orations, “ is
“ the man among us who has so hardened a mind,
“ and so unfeeling a heart, as not to be deeply af-
“ fected at the death of ROSCIUS!” CATULLUS
compares his form, with all its imperfections, to the
refulgent beauty of the rising sun. Indeed he might
have gone on through the splendor of all the stages
of that luminary; for, if we may credit the nu-
merous eulogiums on his merit and virtues, he was
glorious even in his decline.

The character of ÆSOP was in every respect
different. As an actor he confined himself to tra-
gedy, which by this time had gone far beyond de-
clamation, almost the only distinction it attained in
GREECE; he seems to have perfected the acting of
tragedy by infusing into his very soul the sentiments
and feelings of the character he had to represent.
PLUTARCH tells us, that, one day, he performed
Atræus; and in that part in which he considers how
he may best kill THYESTES, he worked himself into
such a pitch of ungovernable anger, that a servant
happening to pass by, he struck at him with his
sceptre and laid him dead at his feet.

ÆSOP was one of the greatest voluptuaries of
his time, and this may serve to give an idea of the
prodigious riches which were the reward of thea-

trical talents in ROME. If an actor could have emulated the extravagance of LUCULLUS and others, and refined upon gluttony till the value of a single dish should amount to five hundred pounds; what must have been his emoluments? *ÆSOP* is said to have gone on in this profusion during a long life; and, at length, so far from dying insolvent, to have left his son enough to enable him to play the same game over again with additions and improvements; for not content with costly dishes, he added costly beverage, presenting his guests with dissolved pearls* to wash down stewed tongues of speaking and singing birds.

ÆSOP, owing, perhaps, to his profligate way of living, fell off greatly towards the latter part of his life. This failure of his powers induced him to retire from the stage, and when, with the vanity of a veteran, instead of listening to prudence, and contenting himself with the well earned laurels he wore, he rashly exposed himself, many years after he had

* *CLEOPATRA*, we are told, regaled *ANTONY* in the same manner. To be sure these things are as incredible as they are contemptible. A wag who chose, by way of reconciling credulity with probability, to put a ludicrous construction on this fact, might reason in this manner. Any thing is said to be dissolved that is made away with, and thus *ÆSOP* and *CLEOPATRA*, to provide their friends with a dinner, sent their jewels to the pawn-broker's.

retired, on the opening of POMPEY's theatre. The Romans received his ineffectual efforts to please with a mixture of pity and contempt.

What has injured the consequence of the Roman actors, and, indeed, most of their men of genius, is their having so far let down their pride as to mix with great men who treated them merely as buffoons. SYLLA could go no where without his herd of poets, musicians, actors, and mimics; in which frolics ROSCIUS is reproached with having joined. in the mummery of SOREX and MATROBIUS.

ANTONY is said to have come reeling to the Senate after sitting up all night at the wedding of HIPPIAS. The actor SERGIUS had such interest with him as to get rewards from him, and make him confer favours; and CYTHERIS, an actress, had the address to manage his heart at her capricious will. She attended him in his excursions; her equipage was prodigiously expensive; till, at length, she became the mimic representative in ROME, of what CLEOPATRA was afterwards the reality in EGYPT*.

* To keep up this resemblance, FULVIA, the wife of ANTONY, was as jealous of this actress as was his other wife OCTAVIA, afterwards of CLEOPATRA. It is said, that in revenge, FULVIA endeavoured to captivate AUGUSTUS, and that having gone so far as unequivocally to manifest her wishes, which declaration

After all, though the merit of the Roman actors must have been very great and extraordinary, yet there is something extremely revolting in the strange and inconvenient mediums by which the pieces were represented to the audience. One of the actors spoke while another accompanied him with proper gestures. The voice of the reciter was conveyed through a tube of brass, for otherwise how could it have been heard by so large an assembly. In order to give a stronger idea than mere muscular gesticulation could do of the passion to be expressed, monstrous masks were worn, expressing joy on one side of the face, and grief on the other; so that if the gesticulator did not take

met with a cool return, she grew outrageous at her disgrace, and menaced AUGUSTUS with a civil war. This induced him to write the following epigram, which I have imitated, for I ever did, and I hope I ever shall disdain the servility of mere translation.

EPIGRAM.

That ANTONY prefers an actress' charms;
Must I, per force, take FULVIA to my arms?
FULVIA the wife of ANTONY my friend?
'Tis vile, besides the labour's without end!
For, did I comfort all who disagree
Mongst wedded friends, some one need comfort me;
But 'tis worse yet—the peremptory fair—
Love me, she cries, or else for war prepare.
Thus must I chuse, to finish the dispute,
BELLONA's trumpet, or CYTHEREA's flute;
'To be with laurel, or with myrtle crown'd:
She's devilish ugly—Let the trumpet sound.

good care he might have congratulated his friend with a sad countenance, or murdered him with a merry one.

Much has been said by various authors concerning these masks ; more, indeed, than the subject seems worthy of. It has been contended by some, that the mask covered the head and shoulders, under an idea, I presume, that the head, thus enlarged, would throw the whole frame into symmetry, when the body was raised upon stilts; but this would have been a miserable shift, because in proportion as the mask enlarged the head, and the stilts lengthened the legs, the arms unfortunately would have been ridiculously too short. Others are of opinion that the mask was hollow from the face; and, by taking a greater circumference, appeared to enlarge it, to which the helmit gave assistance; but this expedient, when we add the stilts, will put the arms in the same awkward predicament they were in before. The most probable account, therefore, we have is, that the mask was like gold beaters skin, so transparent, and so artfully prepared and fixed, that the play of the muscles was plainly seen through it, and that the eyes, the mouth, and the ears, were not concealed at all.

On these masks they delineated carefully the features of the very character that was to be repre-

sented. In other respects, as by the mouth and the eyes are expressed the vivacity and disorder of the passions, the movements of the mind were discernable through this thin veil, and by this means the actor was never before the audience but the character.

Thus, by the help of these masks, age became youth, and ugliness beauty. PLINY tells us of an actress who performed comedy to admiration at a hundred years old, at which age one should suppose her whole form would need a mask.

We are, however, far to seek in this business, and the farther we seek the less we shall be satisfied. It is probable that masks of each of these descriptions were used both in GREECE and in ROME; but it must have been entirely to enforce expression on account of the great distance of the actor from the remote part of the spectators; an expedient, however, to remedy an inconvenience is not a perfection; and, in spite of numberless historians, who unanimously agree that the effect of these masks was beyond conception astonishing, in spite of our conviction, as far as it relates to pantomimic characters, the gestures of which were, at the time of RICH, wonderfully expressive; masks that covered the shoulders, must have been frightful and gigantic, masks which extended the size of the

face fantastic and grotesque, and transparent masks, by the impossibility of leaving the apertures correct, and of stretching them so as to play in unison with the muscles, must have exhibited an effect paralytic and ludicrous; and, in spite of the painter, who on these masks laboured so ingeniously to portray the mind, the more he came up to the truth and correctness of nature, the more we should be induced to say, "draw the curtain and let us see the picture."

But there are stronger objections than these, the best acting of *Æsop* and *Roscus* was without masks, and when they came to mere pantomimes, of which we are told such wonderful things, it is impossible to have conveyed a thousandth part of the expression they are reported to have contained, except by an undisguised exertion of the features*.

In short, every exaggerated expedient, invented

* The testimony borne to the celebrity of these pantomimes is truly astonishing. Among other instances it is said, that *Demetrius*, a cynic philosopher, laughed at the folly of the Romans for permitting so strange an entertainment; but having been, with much difficulty prevailed upon to be present at the representation of one of them, he was confounded with wonder. The story represented was the detection of *Mars* and *Venus*, the whole performed by a single actor, who described their interview; *Phœbus* discovering them to *Vulcan* as they lay asleep; *Vulcan* forging the in-

by art, and substituted by necessity, must have been a departure from nature; and the answer of a child might be anticipated, who should be asked whether so gross a violation could be the perfection of that art which can derive no merit but from its fidelity as a representative of nature.

The vagaries of NERO would claim no right to be mentioned here, being no more than the frantic acts of a magnificent madman, by profession an emperor not an actor, had they not degraded the dramatic taste, and hastened the theatre to its dissolution. Happy had it been, however, for his country, and for humanity, had he contented himself with a display of mimic greatness on the stage; if, for every murder in tragedy he had not perpetrated a hundred murders among his subjects; if, with a love of those arts that humanize and correct the heart, he had not unnaturally blended every detestable and sanguinary passion that can debase and corrupt it.

Possessed as he was, without the faintest shadow of

visible net, and afterwards catching them in it; the trouble and confusion of the lovers when they could not disentangle themselves; the Celestials surrounding them with shouts and bursts of laughter; the shame of VENUS, the humility of MARS, the triumph of VULCAN; and, in short, the whole fable; till, at length, the philosopher wrought up to the highest pitch of admiration, exclaimed, that the actor had no occasion for a tongue he spoke so well with his hands.

either poetical, musical, or theatrical abilities, he would be considered as the most consummate practitioner in all; and woe to those who did not unequivocally acknowledge his claim. It was enough that it was his fiat, and that he had proclaimed himself the first artist; till, in this career of alternate folly and wickedness, and growing fatiated with extorted applause at home, he determined not only to make a musical and theatrical tour of his own empire, but to extend his visit to GREECE.

Applause extorted at the point of the sword, attended him wherever he went. No one was permitted to leave the theatre during the time of his performance, and, to manifest the indignation that his performance naturally inspired would have been instant death. It is said that the novelty of an emperor on the stage had at first such an effect, that the audience did not perceive an earthquake which really happened while he was singing; yet, when the first movements of their curiosity had subsided, men leaped privately from the walls to escape from such an absurdity; and women pretended to fall into fainting fits as an excuse to be carried out; while the soldiers were so vigilant in enforcing applause that the looks and actions of men were not their own. An old senator named VESPASIAN, who had fallen asleep during one of these performances, narrowly escaped with his life.

The arts he used to obtain the victory over the performers were truly contemptible. He bribed the judges, ordered his followers to prepare the public mind in his favour, and decry the merit of his competitors. One inconsiderate singer who had great vanity, greater abilities, and more indiscretion than either, sung so much to the satisfaction of the people, that NERO ordered him instantly to be put to death.

Among the Greeks, however, now effeminated, profligate, and artful, so much precaution was unnecessary. NERO proclaimed himself an APOLLO wherever he went; and, though he was thrown out at the Olympic games, he not only obtained the crown, but afterwards at the Isthmean, Pythian, and the Nemean games, where he performed still worse. In short, he remained a whole year in GREECE, where all was feigned extacy, and hypocritical rapture at his different performances; nay, he bore off from thence eighteen hundred crowns earned by his extravagant folly, and given by their political cunning; and, so far was this from softening his mind, the remainder of his life was a studied climax of cruelty.

Dramatic representations became from this period more and more licentious. The pantomimes, which had long prevailed, and which had

caused so much tumult and mischief, at length fell off and tragic-comedy gained ground. This heterogeneous representation, admitting of every thing monstrous and ridiculous, destroyed by degrees all regularity and order; and, as it grew ruder and ruder, it partook of all the bitterness and malignity of personal and pointed satire*.

At length the courage of Romans was visible only in their dramas, for in these they boldly ventured to introduce under the mask of fiction, accusations which for their lives they dared not openly to broach†. Strong genius, however, true wit, and genuine humour, having gradually withdrawn from the stage, after a time it became deplorable; and, as it followed the example of GREECE in its rise, so did it in its dissolution.

* These satires were even more bold and daring than those formerly spoken of, and which, even so early as five hundred and twenty years before, it was thought expedient to suppress. So fast was the Romans degenerating to their original barbarity.

† Not even the emperor was spared. NERO had connived at poisoning his father, and attempted to drown his mother; and DATUS, the actor, to revive the recollection of those horrid transactions, introduced in one of those faragoes a song, the burthen of which was, "Farewell father, farewell mother." The better to make known his meaning, he accompanied the words of "farewell father" with the action of drinking and making wry faces; and when he came to "farewell mother," he counterfeited a struggling in the water.

CHAP. XII.

SPANISH THEATRE.

As the theatre in SPAIN, even to this moment, has never had to boast of any thing regularly dramatic, it would be difficult; if not impossible, to give a methodical account of it. The wit and humour that have so lavishly pervaded it, manifest the most luxuriant fertility in the genius of their dramatic writers; whose works, crude and irregular as they are, have served like a rich mine for the French, and, indeed, the English at second hand to dig in. Their wit, however, like their hard dollars, can never be considered as staple, but a useless mass of no intrinsic value till manufactured into literary merchandize by the ingenuity and labour of other countries.

The Spaniards had some knowledge of dramatic entertainments, even when the Romans began first to be celebrated for good poetry. The ruins of so many ancient theatres—the vestiges of which are

yet to be seen in their principal towns—give incontestible proofs how much they were delighted with this species of amusement; but the Goths, and other Barbarians that overrun the kingdom, drove out the Muses, and consequently among them THALIA. As for MELPOMENE she never even to this hour resided in SPAIN.

The Arabs, however, brought THALIA back again, and by introducing a rude sort of superstitious drama, which was intermingled with grotesque provincial farce, established the foundation of the first Castilian plays. The subjects were sometimes the loves of shepherds, and sometimes different points of religion; such as the birth of our Saviour, the Passion, the Temptation in the Desert, and the Martyrdom of some of the Saints. These sacred pieces were played as intermezzos, and the decorations consisted of views of Paradise, Hell, the Trinity, the Sacrament, and to make the resemblance more interesting, it was no unusual thing, in this strange jumble of sacred and profane, to administer benedictions, and sing *Te Deum**.

* We have gone yet but a little way towards this on our stage. In action we have to be sure now and then introduced *Noah's Ark*, *Solomon's Temple*, *Heaven*, *Hell*, and some other similar objects, and held up MOSES, AARON, and the Man after God's own heart as tree-masons. But in our oratorios we come on pretty well. The

In one of these pieces entitled *The Creation*, ADAM enters on one side, and the CREATOR on the other: CHAOS stands in the middle. ADAM entreats GOD to destroy CHAOS, and create MAN. In another piece the DEVIL tempts the Chevalier St. JAMES—who is described to be of a good fa-

Messiah, the *Redemption*, and such familiar titles—by way of companions to the *Tarantula* and the *Cabinet of Monkies*—are sported against all the old walls in town; and I remember in one of these sacred dramas, as they are facetiously called, which had for its title the *Ascension*, that in the moment OUR SAVIOUR is supposed gradually to disappear to soft music, the orchestra, in a most rapturous style, struck up, “*De’el take the Wars that hurried Willy from me.*” This charming performance, by way of digression, was performed *once*, and GIARDINI was present. After it was over that connoisseur was asked how he liked the music, to which he answered: “Oh, Sare, “de man who is discontent wid dis music, most be very unreasonable—for it contain great many little bit of all de celebrated “master dat ever have compose.” Though, however, we have yet only gone these lengths, I think we need not despair. When the rage for HANDEL’s music shall be a little higher—for our present inattention can only be considered as a paroxysm gone off—I should not think it extraordinary if we were to be entertained with seeing the mighty SAMSON pull down the pasteboard temple of DAGON, the shepherds in the *Messiah* piping to profile sheep, or that noble *Coup de theatre* in *Josbua*, where Mr. HANDEL so beautifully makes the sun stand still, TO MUSIC. But such bold improvements one can only expect by degrees: in the mean time we must content ourselves, if we would wish, according to the cant phrase, to see such objects as natural as life, with resorting to those itinerant theatres called puppet-shews, where Mr. PUNCH introduces you to the whole court of SOLOMON, by way of first piece, and afterwards entertains you with JEPHTHA’s rash vow, or the *Virgin sacrificed*, for a farce.

mily—to reject our SAVIOUR because he is only the son of a carpenter, and cannot produce letters of nobility. In short, it is impossible to imagine a thousandth part of the insufferable ignorance and absurdity these strange farragoes contained, which are not to this day entirely abolished.

What astonishes one most is the ludicrous and blasphemous applications they continually make of the texts of scripture. There is scarcely any passage in the prayers of the church, or in holy writ, but is employed in these burlesque scenes in the most indecent manner. A valet asks a girl if she be a virgin. ‘Yes indeed I am,’ says the girl, ‘but don’t you think so yourself.’ The valet with great seriousness quotes St. THOMAS, and says, ‘*Nisi videro, non credam.*’

These extraordinary jumbles, however, are now little performed, except in the remote parts of the kingdom, where prejudice still reigns in all its influence;—whereas, at CADIZ, BARCELONA, VALENCIA, and MADRID—which places are frequented by strangers, and consequently more polished—the dramatic entertainments are better regulated.

At the early period of the Spanish drama, while

buffoons, jugglers, and histrions, who found their way to SPAIN as well as to ROME, amused the people with these heterogeneous representations, men of good sense, who noticed the regularity and nature which characterised the best works of antiquity, beheld with displeasure how much these monstrous farces were beneath the wisdom and the taste of the ancients.

A strong desire to remedy this, induced them to compose dialogues, which they called comedies; yet these were too tedious and unconnected to admit of representation. Their tendency, however, was meritorious, but they made little progress towards the cure of the licentious manners of the times. At length these plays began to be mixed with that very libertinism they were originally written to explode.

Such is the famous comedy of *Calixtus and Melibeus*, where the descriptions are so lively, the characters so loose, and the circumstances so lascivious, that it was considered as dangerous to expose them to public representation. In other respects these plays were much too long to be patiently heard to an end; yet as they ardently wished for something on the stage less reproachable, some translations in prose from the Greek and Latin drama ef-

fectcd in time a considerable reform in the Spanish theatre.

LOPES DE RUEDA, a native of SEVILLE, was the first who gave reputation to the drama in SPAIN. He was both a poet and a player. CERVANTES says that he excelled in pastoral poetry, which he worked as episodes into his dramatic pieces—but the theatre was yet a rude piece of building, containing only four very long seats. The actors were habited in skins fringed with gold, and in a large piece of tapestry, drawn aside by two cords, consisted the whole of their scenery, machinery, and decoration; but yet they were greatly followed, and RUEDA acquired incredible reputation in parts of simplicity, braggadocia, and vulgarity.

The famous author of *Don Quixote*, started as a comic writer. With a happy and fertile invention, he wrote several admirable pieces which might have served as a model to his country. LOPES DE VEGA, on the contrary, despised the rules of the ancients, and banished probability, regularity, and decency from the stage. His heroes came into the world, grew up, became old, and died in the same representation. They ran all over the earth; they slept in the east, dined in the north, and when he found the world too small for their pranks, he conducted them into

the air, to go to bed. His valets spoke the language of courtiers, his princes of coxcombs, and his ladies of quality that of fish women. His actors made their entrance in a mob, and their exits in confusion. In one piece probably you have sixty principal characters*.

The rules of art were not much better observed in CALDERONE. A play is the history of a man's whole life, which he, sometimes contrives to spin out for sixty years, without plan, preparation, or probability; and, to add to all this barbarous absence of taste, the more affecting scenes are filled with the grossest buffoonery. A Prince, in a situation of inexpressible wretchedness, is interrupted by the senseless pleasantry of some impertinent servant: and yet, in spite of these defects, CALDERONE is the idol of the Spanish theatre; and after all it must be confessed that you admire in his style a nobleness of diction, an elegance without obscurity, while his artful manner of keeping the spectators in

* CERVANTES blamed LOPES DE VEGA, for this licentious abuse of the ancient rules; to which LOPES answered:—"As the people pay us, it is very proper we should please them, which nothing but the grossest ignorance can do; I, therefore, lock up ARISTOTLE and HORACE, because they continually reproach me for departing from my duty as a dramatic writer, and as for PLAUTUS and TERENCE I never hold any conversation with them but they have the impudence to criticise every one of my productions."

a pleasing yet continual suspense, has a truly ingenious and comic effect.

SOLIS, MORETO, ZAMORA, CANDAMO, and CANIZAREZ, merit praise for having approached nearer to regularity. That, however, which we find most wonderful in the dramatic authors of this nation is the prodigious, the immense quantity of their works. It is impossible to hear without astonishment that LOPES DE VEGA composed two thousand different pieces for the stage; yet, when we consider the nature and the form of these works, the phenomenon is more easy to be conceived. The Spaniards have a great number of rhapsodies under the titles of chronicles, annals, romances, and legends. In these they find some historical anecdote, some entertaining adventure, which they transcribe without choice or exception. All the details they put into dialogue and to this compilation is given the distinction, *PLAY*: thus one can easily imagine that a man in the habit of copying with facility, could write forty of these plays in less time than an author of real genius and regulated habitude could put out of his hands a single act; for the latter is obliged to design his characters, to prepare, graduate, and develop his intrigue, and to reconcile all this to the rules of decency, taste, probability, and, indeed, custom.

It is curious that the Spanish plays, which are no more than romances in dialogue, have been frequently re-transformed into romance. The task cannot be difficult: it is only to render the dialogue again into recital. LE SAGE has done this several times in *Gil Blas*, and this is not the worst part of the work. His history of AURORA DE GUZMAN is translated from a play of MORETO*. Nor has LE SAGE been the only one who has built a reputation on the plunder of Spanish dramatists. Madam GOMEZ, SCARRON, and others have done the same; and it may be fairly averred, that most

* Our THOMSON goes still further, and gives us, in his *Tamcred and Sigismunda*, a novel out of *Gil Blas*. MOORE, whose *Gamester* is so full of tenderness, and proves, in spite of MADAME DACIER, and all DE LA MOTTE's enemies that prose touches the heart more sensibly than verse, has given the English stage another play which has its origin in the same work. It is, indeed, a very advantageous thing for the theatre that historical justice obliges me to record this; for it points out a source of materials through which the stage may be supplied for ages, which source, in its primitive state, though a kind of literary chaos, is to the full as regular as most of the modern dramatic productions. It is true this fountain has been frequently visited, particularly by the ladies. But it is a source difficult to exhaust; and if, after all, authors are too dull, or too lazy to carry their theatrical pitchers to the fountain; or too fearful—for pitchers of all kinds too often come home cracked at last—they have nothing to do but steal the pitchers of their neighbours, the French, and appropriate, in a retail way, the contents to their own advantage.

of the novels which had such success in the last century in FRANCE, and part of this century in ENGLAND, are nothing more than Spanish dramas metamorphosed into French and English narrations.

It must be allowed that no nation was ever so fertile in invention, or so wide of regularity as SPAIN: the reason is evident. Spanish gallantry consists entirely of stratagem; and fancy is perpetually upon the stretch to bring about natural events by extraordinary means. Their manners are derived originally from the Moors, and are tinged with a sort of African taste, too wild and extravagant for the adoption of other nations, and which cannot accommodate itself to rule or precision.

Impressed with an idea of that knight errantry which CERVANTES so successfully exposed, Spanish lovers seem as if they took a gloomy pleasure in disappointment. They enter the lists of gallantry as if they were more pleased with the dangers of the tournament than the enjoyment of the reward; and, at length, when they arrive at the possession of that object with which they were originally smitten with a glance from a lattice, or a regard in a cloister through a thick veil; disappointment succeeds to admiration, and they grow jealous and outrageous to find that love is the very reverse of

caprice, and that happiness cannot be ensured but by a long and intimate acquaintance with the heart.

On the other side, the lady, immured from the sight of men, reads romances, and heroically resolves to consider, as her destined lover, the first who has the address and the courage to rescue her from her giant father, and her monster duenna. Reason, prudence, mutual intelligence, purity of sentiment, and affection; these have nothing to do in the affair, Fate settles the whole business and her deliverer, be he ugly or handsome, clownish or accomplished, is sure to carry her with a *coup de main* at the very first interview*.

We have no account of even one Spanish tragedy. The authors chose their characters indif-

* There is a story told of a Spanish lady of quality, who was reading a romance full of extraordinary adventures at the moment she languished under the most cruel apprehensions that her father's austerity and vigilance would render abortive every attempt of her lover to obtain an interview with her. After a number of dangers and difficulties, the lovers in the romance contrive a meeting; when, instead of profiting by the opportunity, they enter into a long conversation on the vicissitudes of love, and accuse fortune for having kept them so long asunder. 'Was ever any thing so stupid,' cries the lady, throwing her book away; 'two lovers to meet by the most unexpected and most fortunate accident in the world, and trifle away their time in talking.'

criminally; and it is very common to hear kings, princes, ministers, peasants, valets, bravoës, and hangmen trying which shall be loudest at the same scene; nay sometimes the latter class have all the interesting situations, while kings and nobles are the buffoons of the piece. It is not that the Spaniards want genius to arrive to this species of dramatic writing: on the contrary, there is an elevation in their minds, a grandeur in their ideas, and a nobleness in their sentiments; but they know little of judgment and taste, nor can their redundant imaginations conform to the rules of art.

Except the spectacles of the court, the Spanish theatres are equally indecent on account of their obscenity and their dirtiness. There are two theatres at MADRID which seem to vie with each other which shall be the worst. Their best acting is low comedy, their declamation being insupportably tiresome, and their speaking through the nose, especially the women, disgusting beyond expression. Between the acts they have grotesque intermezzos, which they play extempore. They are naturally performed, but they exhibit a strange mixture of joy, sentiment, reflection, and satire, and sometimes finish with songs composed in the Italian taste.—The instrumental performers are passible, but the singers detestable.

Although it is not intended to speak of opera as a branch of the dramatic art till it shall make a separate article in the French theatre, at which time its origin and progress will be particularly traced and followed up; yet it is impossible to refrain from noticing here the prodigious avidity with which this species of amusement, though by no means excellent, was followed not sixty years ago under FARINELLI*, whose extraordinary and fascinating talent of imposing upon credulity, will hereafter be enlarged upon in the history of the English theatre.

Fortunately for this strange adventurer, after he had gulled the English to their eternal reproach, and received such a reception from the French, as convinced him they were as well versed in trick as himself, the king of SPAIN happened to languish under a complaint for which, according to his physicians there could be no cure but music.

This intimation FARINELLI took the advantage of to some tune; for, being sent for by the

* Through what medium may a man hope for recompence, and who shall worthily expect the gifts of fortune, when it is a known fact that FARINELLI, in ENGLAND and in SPAIN, received more money than did the DUKE OF MARLBOROUGH for the recompence of all his services in the low countries!

queen, he so ingratiated himself at court that he presently had a pension settled on him of about three thousand two hundred pounds a year, and a coach and equipage kept at the king's expence.

Presents were made him of immense value. The king gave him his picture richly set with diamonds; the queen presented him with a snuff box with two diamonds of high price in the lid; the prince of ASTURIAS prevailed on him to accept of a diamond button and loop worth a prodigious sum; and he condescended to permit persons of all ranks to follow in proportion to their situations these very noble and meritorious examples of their betters.

The length of time that this folly existed is incredible; FERDINAND continued FARINELLI in his situation after the death of PHILIP; and, still to go beyond his predecessor in liberality, honoured him with a cross of Calatrava, one of the most ancient orders of knighthood in SPAIN*. This was about the year 1750, and we find that after this, he

* When FARINELLI was invested with the insignia of the order of Calatrava, according to the custom of the other knights, he wore spurs; which being perceived by a dry old Spaniard, "Well," said he, "each country to its custom. In ENGLAND they arm cocks with spurs, in SPAIN capons."

continued to conduct the opera till the year 1761, when he retired to ITALY with his pension from the court of SPAIN settled on him for life.

We have now seen all that is remarkable or worthy to be related of the Spanish theatre, which, though a strange heterogeneous jumble of jarring atoms, will be found hereafter to have furnished some very rich materials which the French and English theatrical chymists have ingeniously extracted to ornament their own productions.

They certainly prepared the French to receive a true taste for the dramatic art; who, without them, would probably never have imitated SOPHOCLES and TERENCE. The very name of the *Cid* shews whence CORNEILLE drew the original; and MOLIÈRE, who is considered as the creator of the French comedy, derived much of his excellence from the same source.

This subject will be hereafter more fully discussed, when many of the English dramatic writers, with BEAUMONT and FLETCHER at their head, will be shewn to have had obligations to the same quarter, and will serve to prove that the dramatic is truly an imitative art in a larger latitude than its

general acceptance warrants ; for, though nothing more is meant by the naked expression than that poets should produce a faithful imitation of nature, they have clothed it and very often disguised it by servilely imitating one another.

CHAP. XIII.

PORTUGUESE THEATRE.

THE most celebrated dramatic poet among the Portuguese was BALTHAZAR, of the island of MADEIRA, who wrote ancient dramas called *Auto*, of which the greatest part was made up of pious subjects—like the ancient mysteries in FRANCE.—HENRY DE GOMEZ wrote twenty-two comedies, and GIL VINCENT, whom they looked upon as the PLAUTUS of PORTUGAL, served as a model for LOPES DE VEGA and QUIVEDO. It is said that ERASMUS learnt the Portuguese language on purpose to read the comedies of GIL VINCENT.

Spanish pieces, however, are those which are generally performed at LISBON; but the theatre being extremely discouraged, has long languished there. Had it not been for the king's order, no opera would ever have been established in that capital; and, perhaps, it might as well have been let alone, for when they had their theatre, they had nothing to perform in it; whereas, at that time in

FRANCE, they were full of good things without a theatre*.

The theatre, however, which is said to have been very superb, was overthrown by the famous earthquake, which, by some, was considered as a public benefit, for they performed in it so seldom, and at such an expence, that they estimated every representation at nearly four thousand dollars.

* This, a few years ago, was distinctly different from the situation of the Opera in ENGLAND, for we had at that time neither opera-house, nor pieces. Indeed our opera has not, for a considerable while been an object of the smallest consequence. The different acts of the performance are only considered as so many intervals to dress and rest the dancers. ALEXANDER may warble his soul out, and sing his own exploits with all the sweetness of a bulfinch to eternity, and yet be unable to wrest the attention of a single Englishman: but the moment you turn the hero into a whirligig, the whole world surrounds him: renters' and proprietors' shares are bought up at any price, and the concerns of the theatre get into such perplexity, that we are obliged to burn down our opera houses to liquidate their debts.

CHAP. XIV.

ITALIAN STAGE.

DRAMATIC entertainments had birth in modern ITALY under LEO the tenth.—The *Sophonisba* of the celebrated Prelate TRISSINO, the pope's nuncio, was the first regular tragedy known in Europe after those barbarous ages of which I have already given an account; as was the *Calandra* of Cardinal BIBIENA, the first comedy.

The Italians, however, seem to have had as indifferent a taste for theatrical representations as the ancient Romans; as may be gathered from the following account of *Radamistus and Zenobia*. The piece begins with a combat between more than a hundred persons. They fight on the stage, besiege a place, and carry it by assault, and, though the whole drift of the tragedy is intended to be as affecting as possible, Punchello is one of the warriors who frightens the combatants, parodies the best speeches, makes a jest of the hero, and behaves with all the ridiculous buffoonery of a puppet; and that the

heroine may not want as striking a contrast as the hero, Zenobia's nurse is represented by a man with a black beard, and a wig made out of a lamb's skin with the wool on. This tender female talks of virtue and delicacy, is frightened lest some one should offer violence to her charms, and gives herself a thousand childish and coquettish airs.

ARIOSTO wrote for the stage. It is said that his father one day was, on some occasion, extremely angry with him. ARIOSTO listened to him with the most steady patience, and most profound attention. He neither said a single word in contradiction of his father, or justification of himself; but on the contrary, heard him to an end with an impatient curiosity, and seemed to wish that the lecture had continued longer. A friend who was present asked him after his father was gone why he had not said something in his own defence. ARIOSTO answered that he had been for some days working at a comedy, and on that very morning had been at a loss how to write a scene of a father reprimanding his son, that at the moment his father first opened his mouth, it struck him as an admirable opportunity to examine his manner with attention, that so he might paint his picture after nature, and being thus employed, he had noticed only the voice, the face and the action

of his father, without in the least regarding the truth or falsehood of what he laid to his charge.

In the time of RANUSE FARNESE, duke of Parma, a prince of uncommon understanding, an old nobleman blindly gave himself up to the arts of an infamous woman. The duke, who had a great regard for his courtier, was touched that he should be a victim to so shameful a passion, and did every thing in his power to cure him of his folly, without informing him of it in direct terms. At length, having made several attempts without success, he caused a comedy to be written, wherein the old nobleman's absurdity was so strongly drawn, that it could not be mistaken; and yet so artfully, that it might be known for personality only by him whom it was intended to reclaim. The duke took the nobleman to the play, who struck with the reproach, not only turned off his mistress, but privately thanked the duke for a lesson by which he benefitted as long as he lived.

The Italian tragedies are miserable indeed. They are languid, verbose, and uninteresting, unless the human mind can be interested by subjects of horror. St. EVREMOND instances this, speaking of *The Feast of the Statue*, from which MOLIERE took his singular but celebrated piece of *Don John*;

“ The most patient man,” says he, “ would die
“ with langour at that stupidest of all dull things
“ the *Feast of the Statue*, and I never see it without
“ wishing the abominable author thunderstruck with
“ his abominable atheist.”

The Italian opera had some resemblance of the theatre at ATHENS. Italian recitative, like ancient declamation, was noted, and sustained *ad libitum* by musical instruments. The chorusses, which were added after a time, and which belonged to the body of the piece, and made a part of the general subject, were, and indeed are yet, expressed by a species of music different from the recitative, in the same manner as the strophe, the epode, and the antistrophe of the Greeks were sung in a manner totally different from the declamation. This was yet more closely adhered to as these spectacles became more perfect, for in many of the serious operas of the Abbe METASTASIO the unity of time, place, and action, are observed; and to this we may add, that these pieces are full of that poetic expression and finished elegance, which embellish a natural subject without confusing it, and which the French say ADDISON only attained among the English, and we that RACINE alone arrived to among the French.

TASSO, GUARINI, and others have also writ-

written comedies, as they were called, which in their way had great beauty and poetical merit, but they were merely pastoral, and, therefore, had little to do with what ought to be considered as comedy. The very names of *AMINTA*, and *PASTOR FIDO*, with which pieces every reader of taste is well acquainted, will bear me out in this assertion*.

Other writers, however were not of opinion that pastorals were true comedy; for they acknowledged nothing under that title that was not a jumble of every species; and, as it were, *GOLDONI*, *MACHIAVEL*, *TASSO*, and *GUARINI*, all beat up together. Thus you had in one piece, in modern *ROME*, all those subjects united, which, in ancient *ROME*, it required so many quarrels to keep separate.

Haughty tyrants, languishing lovers, bears, devils,

* It is, however, at least worth a reflection that, notwithstanding the established criterion at this moment of tragedy and comedy, is that species of writing which excites in one the more tender and touching sensations, and in the other the more mirthful and exhilarating, the Italians, in these pastorals, stuck closely to the true ancient meaning of comedy, which is composed of two Greek words, and signifies no more than 'song of the village.' *TASSO*, and *GUARINI* were writers of taste and learning; and very likely to know decidedly, being nearer to the time, what the Greeks originally meant by comedy.

cupids, and scaramouches were presented you all in the same piece; and every thing was conducted in a manner so truly ridiculous, that if their intention was that comedy from that time should be considered as nothing more than a dramatic exhibition to excite laughter, they fairly succeeded; for, what with the stupidity, the absurdity, or the humour it was impossible to avoid laughing throughout the piece. Unfortunately, however, as much as they gained on the side of the senses they lost on the side of the heart; for whatever there might be to create mirth, there was nothing to create interest.

I very much question, however, whether these very comedies did not go a great way towards perfecting that species of dramatic production; for when they come to be incorporated into the French theatre, the history of which circumstance will be hereafter particularly related, they diffused a lightness into the French taste, which had long languished under the verbosity and dullness of their comedies, as they were called, consisting of some single uninteresting action drawled on through five acts of monotonous verse.

This lightness, infusing itself into general taste, obliged dramatic writers to become conformists; and as it approached nearer to nature than the old

system, as it became adopted by men of real merit who knew what to preserve and what to reject, comedy, by degrees, became interesting as well as amusing.

It is certain, however, it never attained perfection, a distinction it certainly once knew in this country, till we improved, in that as we have done in every effort of genius, on the French; and I shall instance VANBRUGH's comedy of the *Confederacy*, which he translated from REGNARD, to prove this assertion.

In short, though the Italians continued to breathe the same air, and enjoy the influence of the same sun which warmed the Romans, they were no longer distinguished by their talents, nor animated with their virtues, for there was nothing left in ITALY of ROME but its vices. Greatness, courage, and manliness were gone, and nothing but effeminacy, voluptuousness, and licentiousness remained, and thus, if the Roman theatrical representations, by reflecting themselves, were a mixture of virtue and vice; those of the Italians, through the same mirror, were a mass of vice without the relief of any virtue at all.

GOLDONI, though they are the wildest rhapsodies that can be conceived. Those of MACHIAVAL have more merit.—In short, ITALY has to boast of no theatrical spectacles of consideration, but its operas, which, upon some particular occasions, have been most superb and magnificent. All this may be in a great measure attributed to the French, who brought the productions of the Italians into greater perfection by incorporating them with their own, of which I shall hereafter speak more at large, when I shall also speak of what was called the Italian canvasses, planned by RICOBONI and others, which were imported into FRANCE, and begat the original celebrity of their *petit pieces*.

CHAP. XV.

 GERMAN THEATRE.

THE German theatre is about as ancient as the French, and till the times of CORNEILLE and MOLIERE was as brilliant, and abounded as much in good authors. But as the French theatre improved, the German theatre degenerated. GOTTSCHED, of the academy instituted at BOLOGNE, and professor of the *Belles Lettres*, at LEIPSIK, re-established and entirely changed the scene, about the year 1700. He formed young actors, and excited young poets to write*. CATO, of UTICA, gave, as one may say, the signal for this revolution.

Finding, however, they were cultivating an ungrateful soil, they soon saw nothing of consequence could be produced original; they, therefore, set themselves down to translations, and ever since CORNEILLE, RACINE, VOLTAIRE, MOLIERE, and

* Pity but some GOTTSCHED would start up in ENGLAND.

DESTOUCHES have been the support of the German theatre.

The German opera, so much esteemed in the last century, particularly in HAMBURG, BRUNOWIG, WEIFFENFELS, and LEIPSIC, is no more, the Italian opera has taken its place.

The theatre at AMSTERDAM owes its origin to two societies of rhetoricians *, composed of an infinite number of distinguished persons, men of letters, juriconsults, and magistrates. BARDEZIUS, burgomaster and counsellor, P. C. HOOFT, the cele-

* Dramatic productions have overrun HOLLAND as well as every part of GERMANY, and have reached even to SWEDEN; where they were established by the famous BARON DE HOGBERA, a very extraordinary character. He was the son of a soldier, who, from the ranks, became ennobled. Deprived of his parents very early in life, and destitute of fortune, he taught himself to read; and, going on step by step, he acquired a considerable insight into several sciences with no master but his own genius and observation. At seventeen years old, without money or recommendation, he determined to make the tour of Europe on foot, to perfect himself in his studies. He traversed FRANCE, GERMANY, and HOLLAND, where he instructed the peasants in different methods to improve husbandry, and received lodging and nutriment for his pains. After this he arrived in ENGLAND enriched with all the knowledge of Europe. The public, however, knew little of his merit till he established himself at COPENHAGEN, where his excellent productions soon made him known and admired. His comedies, eighteen in number, established the Danish theatre.

brated poet, and the famous JOOST VAN VONDEL, were at the head of the confederacy.

These two societies began to dispute on different subjects about 1584. Their pieces at first were only dialogues in verse on the news of the time, the events of the nation, or mythological fictions; and served very meritoriously as a school to regulate the manners and furnish the amusement of a laborious and industrious people.

In time, however, they disagreed. Each society ridiculed the proceedings of the other, and their former eloquence degenerated into severe invective and bitter satire; till, at length, to obtain order, the magistrates came to a determination to suppress them both. The people were, however, unwilling to give up their favourite pleasure; and after a variety of difficulties, it was finally agreed that they should unite. This gave satisfaction to all parties, and, about 1635, a physician of the name of SAMUEL KOSTER, built a theatre where both the societies were incorporated into one body.

KOSTER, however, could not support the expence of this theatre, and it was bought of him by the guardians of the orphans and the aged, to whose use the profits were charitably appropriated; and thus, by converting it into an institution so lauda-

ble, the theatre began to have considerable celebrity.

The performances, however, with the exception of a very few, were gross and beastly. In one of them, which is a representation of ABRAHAM offering up his son ISAAC, ABRAHAM having tied ISAAC to a stake, very leisurely takes out an old rusty horse pistol, and measuring six paces with great deliberation, presents his piece; when, all of a sudden, finding some wet descend into the pan, he looks up and sees an angel in a certain attitude, who had occasioned what he had mistaken for rain. ABRAHAM is in the greatest consternation, when the angel cries out, "Der taiple ABRAHAM will ta te younker
" flauken?"

These brutal representations made up for a considerable time the delight of the Mynheers; till, at length, they improved the stage by translations of Spanish comedies, and French tragedies, originally introduced by a society of Portuguese Jews, who established a theatre, to which the Hollanders were invited gratis, the better to keep up a good understanding between the Portuguese and the Dutch in commercial negotiations.

Their first efforts, however, were clumsy enough. If CALDERONE was full of extravagance on the

Spanish theatre, his curvettes, and his caprioles, were, of course, imitated, as awkwardly on the stage of AMSTERDAM, as a guinea pig imitates a squirrel; and, as for CORNEILLE I cannot refrain from giving one instance how adroitly he was rendered into Dutch:

There is a well known passage in the *Cid*, where the father of RODRIGO stimulates his son to revenge; and, not satisfied with the assurance he had before given him, stopping him short he says, “a
“ tu un cœur RODRIGUE?” He replies, pointedly,
“ tout autre che mon pere le trouvera sur l’heure.” The Dutchman, determined to be as phlegmatic as the Frenchman was brilliant, has rendered it thus: “ Ap ye a hart RODRIGUE.” “ Yaw, papa,” cries RODRIGUE.

CHAP. XVI.

OBSERVATIONS ON ALL THE PRECEEDING
CHAPTERS.

PRÉPARATORY to the French theatre, which will be the next article, it may not be immaterial to gather up, by way of gleanings, all those minute particulars which will serve to confirm and perfect the crop of intelligence already housed, and also leave a clear field for the harvest that is to succeed it.

Nor can a better figure be devised as an object to symbol theatrical productions; which smack of the country where they are produced as faithfully as corn or wine: not reflecting general truth, but particular manners;* not holding up the mirror to nature, but to the times; not appealing to the perfection of the human mind, but to its caprice.

* It has been extremely well said that, though we ought to respect the ancients we shall seldom succeed in the sort of respect due, or that would have been acceptable to them, on account of the lapse of time between them and us, by which we fail of exactly ascertaining their taste; and this rule equally proves that we should not blindly follow the ancients. ARISTOTLE himself has often considered as perfection what was thought so at ATHENS rather than what is really so in nature.

It is on this account that the theatre will have arisen to the truest perfection in that country where the principles of the people are an emanation of true virtue, and real patriotism; where the public mind is informed and enlightened, and where taste knows every thing of reason and nothing of reproach; but, critically speaking, where is this country to be found?

We have seen then, as far as we have gone, that the theatre has arisen to no real perfection; for, whether we take it from that reproach to GREECE, the death of SOCRATES, or the combination of every thing worthy and vile, just as caprice happened to dominate in ROME, confirmed by the accommodating disposition of PLAUTUS, and the declaration of AUGUSTUS; or the mad frolics of the Spaniards, countenanced by the answer of LOPES DE VEGA to CERVANTES, the theatre has hitherto been little more than a pander to the times. Without the theatre, nevertheless, those nations we have traversed, and those manners we have witnessed, would have lamented a mortifying and uncomfortable chasm in their time, and a considerable deficiency in their civilization.

What then would have been the theatre had it

nobly asserted its privilege, had it resolutely assumed its legitimate right, and possessed itself of its real province? It would then have purified those manners which it too often corrupted, it would have refined that bad taste it too frequently tolerated, and have given to literature an active example of having planted reason in the human mind.

But how was this to be accomplished? Poets did not write for reputation but for hire; they did not chuse to undertake the romantic task of teaching virtue such as it ought to be and starve, they rather contented themselves with describing it, such as the people wished it to be, and live voluptuously.

Yet we have seen the theatre in GREECE an object of real importance; for it is difficult to conceive a truer picture of exalted greatness than that meritorious distinction which could at once correct dissipation and conciliate ferocity; and this was exactly the operation of the theatre in its influence over ATHENS and SPARTA immediately before ARISTOPHANES.

But the times were to be thanked for this, and not the poets. The famous saying in the theatre of the old Spartan, "that the Athenians knew what virtue was, but that the Lacedemonians practiced

“ it ;” gives a picture uncommonly beautiful of the effect of a theatrical production at GREECE. The instance of ARISTIDES being admired for his virtues, by implication, in a play, and that so delicately as not to wound his feelings although he was present, is one fortunate proof among thousands that the theatre, worthily conducted, is the true medium to promulgate honourable emulation.

But as the manners grew corrupted, the theatre, at the very time it was the post of honour, at the moment it was its particular province to stem the torrent of licentiousness, cowardly deserted its station and was hurried away with the stream. It would have been a glorious thing that some MENANDER had started up at the time of ARISTOPHANES, if it had been only to shew, while yet the Greeks retained a recollection of those virtues for which they will ever be quoted as a great example, that the human heart is easier moved by conciliation than by menace*.

* Whence ARISTOPHANES could conjure up such wonderful fame is astonishing. There is an epigram attributed to PLATO, though the title certainly does not imply that sort of poem calculated to convey a compliment, not at the same time that it is incapable of it, which says, “ that the Graces after having searched through the whole world for a place to build an eternal temple, chose

From the parodies of SOPHOCLES and EURIPIDES by ARISTOPHANES, may fairly be dated the fall of the stage which improved upon from ÆSCHYLUS under those wonderful authors, wonderfully, considering the time in which they wrote, had it gone on to the perfection it was capable of, would certainly have given laws to literature. Instead of which it gradually degenerated, and though we have witnessed many lucid intervals through which it has struggled, it could not be considered in any thing like a state of convalescence till SHAKESPEAR* gave to ENGLAND a more brilliant fame than ÆSCHYLUS had given to GREECE.

“ for this immortal structure the mind of ARISTOPHANES; from whence they have never since removed.” If gall, invective, scandal, malignity, and every thing that can debase the honest drift of fair, open, generous, general satire, are the materials with which the Graces chuse to build their immortal temple, may they ever reside in the mind of ARISTOPHANES!

* It will be hereafter my willing duty to prove that SHAKESPEAR, to a much greater extent than has been related or, perhaps, believed by the most faithful of his biographers, or the warmest of his advocates, diffused a glow of reputation into dramatic literature, which was felt by surrounding nations. It must be remembered that he came long before CORNEILLE and MOLIERE; who, great and celebrated as they deservedly were, do not both together make up one SHAKESPEAR; and it will not be difficult to shew that, though the theatre in FRANCE commenced much earlier than that in ENGLAND, the latter arrived soonest to perfection.

As to the Romans they were too turbulent a people to encourage a real and decided taste for theatrical productions; besides there was always a policy among them mixed with every thing public just as it served to promote some innovation, intrigue, cabal, insurrection, or assassination; and thus dramatic representations were a specious lure, a tub to the whale, to divert the minds of the people from some impending treachery, and not an excitement to excellence in paths of true glory and unfulfilled honour.

It was through this that their dramatic poets held a station below the level of their gladiators, their mimics, and their rope-dancers; which the great AUGUSTUS professedly promoted, rather than restrained instead of stimulating writers of acknowledged merit by means of the stage, to admonish the people out of their irregularities.

The Spanish theatre, though more irregular than the Roman, was less mischievous, for it corrupted nothing of the nation but its taste; and I would rather see twenty FARINELLI's tickle the ears of the Spanish nobility till they were gulled out of their money, than one NERO inuring his mind to fictitious murder on the stage that it might render him more expert in the murder of his subjects. Besides the

Spaniards have left something behind worth imitating, whereas from the Roman authors we have nothing but a Greek filtration, tasteless and insipid, from the flatulent *SENECA* to the tame *TERENCE*, whose works a celebrated critic calls comedies for mathematicians.

The Portuguese theatre is swallowed up in the Spanish, and the German in the French; so that admitting, which it is perfectly right to do, the theatres in all countries are not only useful but materially essential, the stage, according to its meritorious establishment at the time of *ÆSCHYLUS*, and its improvement under *SOPHOCLES* and *EURIPIDES*, degenerated, both as to tragedy and comedy in *ROME*; and, though the Spanish comedies have supplied a large fund of admirable materials, yet, in proportion as the theatre lost sight of *GREECE*, is lost sight of regularity,

There cannot be a properer time than this to enter into a fair examination of the true value of what is called dramatic regularity, and to shew how far, rationally, the unities ought to be preserved, or may be occasionally broken.

What are these rules but a recommendation of what was considered as perfection in *GREECE*?

ARISTOTLE has added nothing to this; he has only repeated word for word the methods which regulated the writings of SOPHOCLES and EURIPIDES, without adding a single idea to theirs but what has confounded the thesis on which he rests his argument.

He recommends the unity of action, certainly an important precept, but already put in practice before he suggested it. He excludes from the theatre, as a remark from himself, characters purely virtuous, which are precisely, not only according to SOPHOCLES and EURIPIDES, but according to reason, the very characters that ought to be introduced into a dramatic piece.

It was ARISTOTLE who consecrated that nonsensical opinion that to form an interesting action it is necessary to introduce some great and celebrated person. This idea is little worthy a philosopher, who should be the first to feel and to acknowledge that private life, or even obscurity, frequently furnishes instances of exalted virtue and genuine magnanimity unmixed with the remorse that attends the extermination of nations to add to the celebrity of a hero*.

* ALEXANDER himself seems to have been more candid than his preceptor, for when a poet sung of his justice and moderation at the sack of SIDON, "Here's a fellow," said he; "he celebrates me as an honest man at the moment I am robbing a whole city."

But the preceptor of ALEXANDER was obliged to square his dramatic rules by those which were most likely to flatter his disciple. He, therefore, in this instance deserts his original plan, probably because he trembled under the hand that had strangled CALISTHENES and PARMENIO, in whose plot against the life of ALEXANDER he was by the way suspected to have had a hand.

The sublime genius of ARISTOTLE made the wonderful discovery that there are but four sorts of tragedy. There are as many sorts as there are subjects, just as there are as many faces as there are men. Nature is infinite, and it is sterility alone that searches for excuses in the absence of invention.

He insists that tragedy ought to be confined to a small number of families, a reflection evidently that comes from ancient GREECE, very proper for the observance, at that time, of that republic, but which, held out to other nations, would restrain the art rather than extend it. Thus the inviolable rules of ARISTOTLE, which it is ridiculous to apply generally to other nations, are no more than an enumeration of the beauties he found in the Greek poets; and, as to the faults which he has held up as proper to be exploded, he might as well have been silent on the subject, for as they are gross and palpa-

ble, and such as no man of genius could possibly have stumbled on.

Thus ARISTOTLE has written nothing new on this subject. He has only transcribed a notice, and stuck it up, one would think by way of a pasquinade by anticipation on his commentators*; who, enveloped in ancient manners, are lost in a circle, out of which they have not, even in imagination, been able to extricate themselves; till, thus bewildered, they have rendered him unintelligible to us, whose beauties they fancy they have elucidated, which beauties they falsely conceive were intended for the advantage of posterity.

I shall be told, however, that there are many luminous traits in the poetics of ARISTOTLE; and, among the rest, that admired precept will be quoted that “the beauty of poetry consists in order and “grandeur;” but, good heaven! what is this more than a self evident truth which was known long before ARISTOTLE was born, and which will be as plain as day light for ages after every present in-

* “The innumerable multitude,” says a French author, “of “ARISTOTLE’s commentators, who stun us even in these days, and “in full academy, seem to me to be a troop of the most invincible “idiots that ever profaned literature.”

habitant of the world shall have perished? Are men to have rules to know when the sun shines? But it is not the fault of ARISTOTLE, who little dreamt that, while he was endeavouring to regulate the poetics of a small commonwealth long since annihilated, his rules would beget so much controversy in so many countries, to whose manners most of them were uncongenial, and whose men of genius would have been better employed, instead of adopting dogmatic opinions, in following universal truth, and erecting rules for themselves*.

But I shall leave ARISTOTLE, at present, with a declaration, that since his rules, hitherto known to us, which have only extended to tragedy, have fet so many learned men together by the ears, as a lover of harmony and good order, I am not one of those who lament that his precepts for comedy did not descend to posterity†.

* M. L'ABBE D'AUBIGNAC, in his dedication of *Zenobia* to one of the princes of the blood, piqued himself on having given a perfect model of the *ancient Tragedy*, and critically followed the rules of ARISTOTLE: THE PRINCE returned for answer, that "he was extremely pleased M. L'ABBE D'AUBIGNAC should so closely observe the rules of ARISTOTLE, but he was very angry, indeed, with the rules of ARISTOTLE that they should oblige M. L'ABBE D'AUBIGNAC to write *so bad a tragedy*."

† One may illustrate this by an anecdote, rather laughable to be sure, but which will clearly prove that we are indebted to ARISTOTLE

The poeticks of HORACE appear to be still inferior to those of ARISTOTLE; nay, it is doubtful to me whether he ever intended them as that universal lesson for which they have been received. But this with his advocates will be an argument in his favour; for, if what he considered merely as private instruction has been, by the consent of mankind, generally adopted, it will argue a proof of its intrinsic merit; and this I should willingly consider as a decision that ought to be final were it not that the premises will not bear out the fact; but, on the contrary, the more we examine, the less reason we shall have to allow HORACE that fame which he really did not seek, but which the world, or rather public clamour

or rather to those who published his works two hundred and seventy years after his death, or else, to accident that these strictures on comedy never were given to posterity. Seven pilots went out in a yacht to examine the buoys and regulate the soundings on a part of the English coast, for the purpose of making a new chart; during this trip four of them, who had been severally hailed to pilot in ships, which were making a neighbouring port, left their three companions to complete their survey; who, while they were providing for the safety of others, by some miscalculation endangered their own, for they ran the yacht aground, and after great difficulty made a shift to get home in the stage coach. They were relating the circumstance in the evening, when a dry old tar noticed, that they had been remarkably lucky to escape so well. "Lucky," said one of the pilots. 'Ay to be sure,' said the sailor, 'for if it was necessary to have three pilots to run the vessel ashore if the whole seven had remained in her she must infallibly have been staved all to pieces.'

as in the case of ARISTOTLE, has been so ready to award him.

When HORACE says that we ought not to couple serpents with birds, or lambs with tygers, or that comic subjects should never be mixed with tragic, he clearly addresses himself to the elder of the PISONS, and not to poets. Where he seriously affirms that it is wrong to roast human entrails on the stage, he cannot have had an idea that he held out universal instruction, because no writer wants to be told that such monstrous circumstances are revolting and detestable; but no such thing was in his mind; he only in addressing the PISONS took an opportunity, by a side wind, of rebrobing the licentiousness of the Roman theatre, which we have seen was at that time both censured in private and encouraged in public by AUGUSTUS, and which is evidently the reason why HORACE was too politic to speak out*.

* Perhaps this difficulty in speaking out was what made HORACE so shy of AUGUSTUS, who asked the poet whether he thought it would be a disgrace to his memory if it should appear to posterity that they had been intimate. This flattery, which quality is as acceptable to poets as to emperors, had its effect, for HORACE immediately dedicated his *Carmen Seculare* to AUGUSTUS, which was exactly what he had been fishing for.

These puerilities, added to the grave assertion that there is a great difference between a slave who speaks and a hero, fairly fatigue us; and shew that, however, they may serve as instruction for youth, they can never be considered as a literary treasure except by pedagogues, who from their own imbecility will always be happy to find precepts for their pupils ready cut and dried to their hands.

But the most curious part of HORACE is his notable discovery that art is as necessary as genius to form a poem. This narrow maxim, perhaps, might have been advantageous to him, who never gave the world any grand, or solid work, but merely ingenious, elegant, and finished trifles; but it would be highly absurd in speaking of poetry in its extended sense, the offspring of intuition, the emanation of the soul. Where is the poetic art that can form a HOMER, a SOPHOCLES, a EURIPIDES? These created those very rules which ARISTOTLE and HORACE fondly dreamt had been invented by them; in which delusion HORACE wraps himself up; and, instead of examining poetic genius as a question of sublimity that soars above all art, he yawns out a declaration that "the union of nature and art produces a happy effect." This precept becomes a fiat, and every school boy acknowledges with astonishment the rare sagacity of HORACE.

VIDA, who is preferred by SCALIGER, to HORACE*, has certainly method, art, and persuasion. He loves poetry, and speaks of it with transport, yet his sentiments, though enthusiastic, are profound as well as lively. He gives his precepts not with a biting and dogmatic air, but in a tone, easy and persuasive, and with all that amiable gaiety which HORACE has every where but in his art of poetry, and which, after all, is an argument both against VIDA, and in favour of HORACE, for it proves that VIDA was the best critic, and HORACE the best poet; and, at last, to shew how difficult it is to find fetters for the mind, VIDA's poem is but a repetition of what VIRGIL had copied before; and, therefore, a proof that poetic rules cannot be an invention to ensure future success, but only an invitation to emulate what has succeeded already.

As to those rules which more particularly relate to the construction of plays, all countries at all times have occasionally violated them to advantage; and the plain answer to those cavillers who have condemned this conduct in the lump, is short and incontrovertible. Let the unities be regulated by the nature of the subject.

* SCALIGER says that HORACE's art of poetry is an art taught without art.

This position had better rest till it be exemplified by the works of authors which will be hereafter spoken of; in the mean time I shall detain the reader from the French theatre no longer than just to say, that it is easier to give your neighbour advice than to take it yourself*; for, notwithstanding the peremptory

*. I have met with a letter in some French author supposed to have been written from the Island of MADAGASCAR, which speaks of a diminutive race of savages, the strength of whose intellects, however, makes up for the feebleness of their form. They are described to have nothing sour nor rancorous in their dispositions notwithstanding the contumely they sustain from the more gigantic savages that surround them; and though they feel this disadvantage, they are moderate enough to resist the insults of their neighbours by teaching them decency, propriety, and decorum. This they do by means of a species of drama, which has obtained such reputation among them that the situation of an actor is considered as the highest in the state. On this account they are very careful to prevent the prevalence of any thing licentious on the theatre; and it is, therefore, permitted that every spectator may come with a sort of catcall, and testify, by playing on it, his disapprobation of any actor, or any passage in the play. Woe be to him, however, if he should happen to whistle malapropos; for, when this is the case, the whistler is obliged to mount the stage and give his reasons publicly for his conduct. If his dislike is to the piece and he points out, to the satisfaction of the audience, any passage that has a tendency to immorality, or that may be considered in any way dangerous or offensive to society, he immediately receives public thanks. If not, he is, what we call, sent to Coventry. If his objection is to the actor, he is obliged to perform the part better, or else, in case of failure, to retire with disgrace from the assembly and never afterwards be permitted to join it. This curious history, nearly as I have stated it, for I quote from recollection, is evidently an invention in revenge, per-

mandates of these law-givers to literature, I don't find that ARISTOTLE, HORACE, VIDA, BOILEAU, or any other of the critics ancient or modern, who have measured and cut out plays, have appeared able, however they might have been willing, to write any thing dramatic themselves.

haps; for some dramatic disappointment its author had sustained. It is, however, a most wholesome lesson, and would be wonderfully serviceable were it adopted in this country. Every thing that is public very properly and worthily attracts public curiosity; but let not, therefore, the labours of the ingenious and the meritorious become the scoff of every ignorant, vain, and envious pretender. Let the public, for the sake of their own consequence, tax the merit of critics; and, in proportion as they possess, upon proof, superior or inferior abilities to those whose labours, and whose livelihood they have the arrogance to reprobate, and the cruelty to undermine, let them be honoured, as the worthy protectors of the arts, or branded as disturbers of the rational pursuits and inoffensive pleasures of their fellow creatures.

BOOK II.

THE FRENCH THEATRE FROM ITS ORIGIN TO THE
DEATH OF CORNEILLE.

CHAP. I.

EARLY INTELLIGENCE RELATIVE TO THE FRENCH
STAGE.

THE dramatic entertainments of FRANCE, originally, and for a length of time, so rude, so monstrous, and so ferocious, came in a direct line from the Romans, and were nothing more than a feeble copy of those brutal games which disgraced the amphitheatres of those conquerors of the world.

If various authorities that corroborate each other may be depended upon, histrions, farcers, dancers, and cudgelers overrun FRANCE as early as the seventh century, who imitated the pieces of the Romans in the infancy of the art, exactly as the Romans in the same manner had imitated the Greeks, representing nature in its rudest and grossest state.

It is plain that these performances, whatever they were, though intended to promote civilization had an effect exactly the reverse; for they grew to such a licentious height that, in the eighth century, CHARLEMAGNE was obliged to suppress them; vainly, however, for the habitude had obtained, and the people would not be diverted from their amusement; and since they had lost their pleasure, because it was considered as irreligious, they were determined to make religion itself the means of restoring it. To this the priests had no objection, for in multiplying religious ceremonies they multiplied their own emoluments; till, as the priests of BACCHUS encouraged these early representations in GREECE, so the priests of FRANCE willingly turned the churches into theatres, where they permitted ridiculous farces, indecent dances, and sacriligious buffooneries. The very vaults where the saints were deposited echoed with scandalous and impious songs.

Upon these occasions the priests often turned actors, and sometimes actresses; hiding their sanctity and their sacerdotal robes under grotesque habits and ridiculous masks; in which disguises they very frequently got drunk, quarrelled, and fought.

These disgraceful spectacles continued more or less, according to circumstances, till about the mid-

dle of the twelfth century, when EUDES DE SULLI, bishop of PARIS, thundered his anathemas against these sacred farces; which, however, were but little suppressed till the Crusades, when, the spirit of the nation leaning towards every thing religious, the French checked whatever served to render religion ridiculous; besides it now became meritorious to conform to religion and yet act farces. Pilgrimages, and wars with the cross as their ensign were good theatrical matter. Troops of these devout itinerants were constantly appearing in the squares and in the market places, and no one was considered as a capital actor who had not noviciated at NOTRE-DAME DU PUY, St. JAMES OF COMPOSTELLA, or JERUSALEM.

These pilgrims, mounted upon scaffolds, sung spiritual canticles, which they had composed on their journies, and exhibited scenes in which they represented some mystery of religion, or the life of some Saint, till, at length, they formed a society, the particulars of which we shall see in its place.

In the mean time we will return to the time when SULLI began to anathematize holy buffoonery, at which epoch it appears that the people, beginning to be disappointed of their amusement through the medium of the church, invited writers and per-

formers to continue it through the medium of those savage feasts in which FRANCE was so fond of emulating the Romans.

The *Cours plénieres*, the *Tournois*, and the *Carroufels* were an imitation of the sanguinary amusements of their ancient masters, and offered to the eyes of the spectator a frightful image of war and all its horrors. By degrees, however, still like the Romans, the French united in their exercises, objects less shocking and offensive, in which they introduced poetry, which was sung at their repasts during the intervals of serving the different courses, and therefore called *entremets*.

The provincial poets, that is to say, those born in the southern provinces of FRANCE and who spoke a language derived from the Romans, and called *Romane provençale* and the French poets born in the northern provinces, whose language came from the same source, but was pronounced differently, and, therefore, called *Romane Françoisise*, these two sorts of poets were the original authors and performers of all the spectacles which, though barbarous enough in themselves, relieved those savage feasts called the *Cours Plénieres*.

They chose such grand circumstances as the

marriages of sovereigns, or the celebration of certain days in the year, either appointed to commemorate great national events, or consecrated to religious purposes. The provincial poets were called *Troubadours*, and the French *Trouverres*, which word in both dialects signifies discoverers, finders, inventors.

Their inventions were called *Jeux partis*, and were divided into what they called *Sirventes* and *Tençons*. Those called *Sirventes* were satires levelled at all sorts of people, something resembling the Saturnines and Fescenines of the Romans before LIVIUS ANDRONICUS, and the Song of the Goat among the Greeks before THESPIS.

In these performances called *Tençons* the subject was love. They were written in dialogue and executed by several interlocutors. Furnished with a number of these pieces, which were lighter, easier to perform, and capable of affording more general amusement than the *Sirventes*, the *Troubadours* and *Trouverres* of the eleventh century, went about from town to town, and villa to villa, accompanied by their minstrels, their jugglers, their posture masters, and their rope-dancers; who, uniting their different talents, performed *entremets*, or entertainments, to amuse large companies.

By degrees these spectacles were varied and extended. Farces and pantomimes were introduced representing subjects from history, and in those pieces were brought forward terrestrial and aquatic animals, and scenes, machinery, and decorations of most ingenious execution, and upon an immense scale.

It is difficult to say what were the dimensions of those buildings where these amusements were performed, or to estimate the prodigious expence they incurred. The mechanic art at that time must have arrived to great perfection, and the resources of those who encouraged it have been immense, to have executed such ingenious and extraordinary conceptions, and have defrayed the consequent expence, especially when we consider that they were performed but a few days in one place.

The dramatic art, however, was yet unknown. This itinerant poetry, like those who cultivated it, knew nothing of any fixed rule. It consisted of irregular songs on the subjects of love and arms, or personal praise or satire, performed by troops of vagabonds, who united poets, composers, actors, singers, and orchestra, all, perhaps, in one family.

FONTENELLE says pleasantly enough, "Song
" begat poetry, or at least was born with it. The

“ poetry of Trouverres was made to be sung.
“ During the repast of a prince, a trouverre would
“ arrive with his minstrels, and his juglers, who
“ began to sing to their harps and viols some curious
“ verses that were composed for the occasion.
“ Those who both sung and wrote were most
“ esteemed. Among the ancient trouverres we
“ find a great number who boasted such exalted
“ names, that there is scarcely at this time a noble-
“ man that would not have been very happy to
“ have descended from them. Every one who
“ could claim a right to half, or even a quarter, of
“ a family castle, though the remainder were mort-
“ gaged, ran about the world rhiming, with a view
“ to redeem his pawned patrimony. Nor did he
“ want encouragement. From some he received
“ arms, from others flags; here cloaths, and there
“ horses; nay, very often, money; and to render
“ the recompense of persons of quality more wor-
“ thy the acceptance of the nobleman disguised as
“ a stroller, the great ladies, even to princesses,
“ joined their favours.

But if we are astonished that, in a nation like
“ FRANCE, where letters have ever been despised,
“ and where we are not yet emancipated from this
“ barbarity, gentlemen and noblemen have for-
“ merly amused themselves with writing poetry, I

“ don't know what else to answer but that it was
“ poetry written without genius, without study,
“ without science, and, therefore, such as will not
“ dishonour nobility.”

Notwithstanding this pleasantry of FONTENELLE, and his kind concern lest the ancestors of the FRENCH nobility should have written good poetry, and, therefore, dishonoured their successors, nothing can be more certain than that persons of the first rank, in the twelfth, thirteenth, and fourteenth centuries, made this amusement their principal occupation.

We find among the number, so early as the year 1100, WILLIAM the Ninth, Count of POITOU, who knew not only how to write verses, but to sing them afterwards; and who was so witty and so pleasant a companion as constantly to keep the table in a roar. This talent was so natural to him that at his return from the first crusade, in which he was far from being fortunate, he sung the fatigues and dangers of that expedition in a poem so full of vivacity that it was considered both as a just ridicule of that strange war, as far as he had witnessed it, and a deprecation of its disgraceful, catastrophe. In 1102, the famous father ABELARD, who was of a noble family, and whose talents and

misfortunes have excited so much admiration and compassion, is said to have written and exhibited as a *trouverre**.

IN 1152, BERTRAND—who was attached to the COUNT DE VENTADOUR, and afterwards to ELEONORE DE GUIENNE wife of LOUIS the Seventh of FRANCE, who married and was divorced from the duke of NORMANDY, since king of ENGLAND by the name of HENRY the Second—This BERTRAND, whose elogium has been given us by PETRARCH, was one of the most celebrated poets of his time. He encouraged the *trouverres* and wrote for them.

From this period to the year twelve hundred we find a long list of noble personages, who both countenanced these sort of performances and assisted them as authors and actors. Among these are the names of the emperor FREDERIC, the dauphin

* This circumstance, by the way, ought to excite no astonishment, for his strange adventures were tragedy, comedy, and farce all in one during his life time; nay, afterwards; for it is said, that when the remains of HELOISE were deposited in his grave twenty years after his death, at which time, taking all the circumstances together, one would think he ought to have been pretty cold, he stretched out his arms and ardently embraced her,

D'Auvergne, the Dominican Missionary, and Inquisitor Izarn, the chevalier Sordel, who was overwhelmed with benefits by St. Boniface, and married Beatrice, through which marriage he was connected with a string of Italian nobility, the count of Vantadour, the countess De Dye, and Richard Cœur de Lion, who all composed and cultivated poetry.

During the next century the number of poets were still more numerous, and not less respectable. Among these were Fouquet, bishop of Marseilles, and afterwards archbishop of Toulouse, Guillaume de Cabestan, who perished a victim to the jealousy of Raymond Cassel de Rousillon de Seilhans, to whom he was page, Anselme Faidit, an author and composer, of whose writings and emoluments Beauchamp enlarges a good deal, Raimond Berenger, count of Provence and of Forcalquier, son of Alphonso, king of Arragon, who married Beatrice, sister of Thomas, count of Savoy, by whom he had four daughters, who were all married to kings. Margarite to Louis the Ninth, king of France, Elenora to Henry the Third, king of England, Sanche to Richard, king of the Romans, and Beatrice, declared by her father heiress to the county of Provence, to Charles,

brother to St. Louis, who was crowned king of NAPLES and the two SICILIES; GASPER DE PUYCIBOT, a great musician, and who performed on many sorts of instruments in great perfection; SORDEL MANTOUAN, in whose works was mixed much moral instruction; PIERRE AUVERGNE, a musician and a poet; ALBERT, marquis of MALASPINA; and LE SEIGNEUR BERTRAND D'ALLAMANON, one of the most learned men of those times, who dedicated his works to ESTEPHANETTE DE ROMANIN, of the family of GANTELME, and aunt to the celebrated LARUA SADO, mistress of PETRARCH. BERTRAND was greatly esteemed and patronized by ROBERT, king of NAPLES, and count of PROVENCE, who was called the Father of the provincial poets.

In the 1306, appeared PIERRE CARDINAL, a man of great talents, who wrote poetry in several languages. The town of TARASCAN assigned him several considerable appointments for his trouble in instructing youths, who, under him, made great progress in learning. He was considered by the great as a man proper to be trusted with commissions of consequence, and, among the rest, by BERTRAND to prevail upon the princess BEATRICE, who had retired to the convent of NAZARETH at AIX, to quit her religious habits and appear like the

daughter of a king; in which undertaking he acquitted himself so well that he conducted her to NAPLES where she married the marquis of EST.

During the next ten years many others made their appearance; and, in the year 1321, PHILIP the Long, count of PORTOU, and afterwards king of FRANCE, became celebrated as a votary of the Muses. He was a prince of a most enlightened understanding; his principal delight was to cultivate and protect literature, and, as a remarkable instance of it, he gave considerable appointments in his household to ten of his dependants because they were poets.

GEOFFREY DE LUC, who established an academy, MADAME DE MARCHEBRUC, and her son, ANSELME DE MOUSTIER, a great favourite of ROBERT, king of NAPLES, BERNARD ROSCAS, related to the Popes, CLEMENT, and INNOCENT the Sixth, and esteemed a greater man than either, ARNAUD DE COUTIGNAC, who was esteemed for his rare prudence, and remarkable for quelling a rebellion for the king of NAPLES, and many others made up the interval from 1320 to 1355, when LE MONGE appeared, who was called the scourge of the Troubadours on account of his writings. He fell most unmercifully on the poets of his time,

sparing neither friend, nor foe, nor persuasion, nor condition ; till, at length, he exposed the tyranny of some of the rulers in the provinces, and was assassinated for his pains.

LE MONGE, however did service both to the cause of poetry and his country ; so much that TARAUDET, who succeeded him, and who wrote with equal severity, but more policy, completely effected that reform his predecessor had only meditated. TARAUDET was born a gentleman, and was bred a warrior as well as a poet. Being in treaty with FOULQUES DE PONTENAS for an estate, FOULQUES, being a great admirer of poetry, contented himself with giving him an easy bargain in consequence of his dedicating to him a work called, *A method to guard the heart against the treachery of love.*

TARAUDET being now rich and a nobleman, assembled the neighbouring nobility and purged PROvence of all those petty tyrants that had so long desolated it.

After these, BOYER, a mathematician, and who as well as poetry wrote on natural history, meteorology, hydraulics and botany, JEAN DE MEUN, a famous theologist, philosopher, astronomist, chymist,

arithmetician, and, above all, a poet, and the illustrious LOUIS DE LASCARIS, count DE VINTIMILLE, celebrated for his talents and his valour when the Normands and the English ravaged PROVENCE, were at the head of literature in FRANCE; till, about 1375, when BERENGER DE PARASOLS gave a new turn to dramatic poetry, having, it is said, composed five regular tragedies.

Of these tragedies there is so particular an account that it is difficult to suspect the truth of his having written them. They have all appropriate names, and the matter of which they are composed consists of satyric particulars relative to the marriages of princes and princesses of those times. BERENGER, according to these authorities, dedicated his tragedies to Pope CLEMENT the Seventh, who recompensed him with a prebendary of PARASOL, where BEAUCHAMP tells us he ended his days, but PARFAICT says he was poisoned on account of the truths contained in his tragedies, which FONTENELLE seems to confirm by hinting that JOAN of NAPLES, hated PARASOLS for having exposed, in one of his pieces, the circumstance of her strangling her husband that she might marry one she thought more amiable.

There is reason to believe, that though these

pieces were called regular they approach very little towards that distinction in the sense we understand it now, being no more than satires in dialogue, and distinguished in nothing from those of DANIEL in 1189, and FAIDIT, in 1220, except in their style.

These poets, together with RICHARD DE BARBEZIEUX, who joined to poetry rhetoric, theology, and mathematics, and Father BONIFACE, related to the most ancient nobility in PROVENCE, and remarkable for his attachment to JOAN of NAPLES, and consequently an enemy of PARASOLS, were the principal among a very large number that made up the literati of the fourteenth century.

In 1408 lived another LE MONGE, from whose information, through different channels, are furnished the preceding particulars. He was made librarian of the monastery of LERINS, of which society he was a member. In the library under his care, which it is said contained a prodigious number of books, he carefully collected the lives and labours of the provincial poets. These materials he was so particular in arranging and digesting, that his authority has been constantly considered as authentic, especially that edition of it corrected and improved by St. CEZARI in 1435.

After this period, to enumerate all those poets that pass in review upon enquiry, would give this work the air of a catalogue rather than a history. More than three hundred names might be set down that different authors have thought it worth while to celebrate.

Many of these lived in the court of TIBALD, where they formed an assembly for the purpose of examining one anothers works after the manner of that school of poetry first instituted by GEOFFREY, DE LUC in 1340, and carried into greater perfection by BERTRAND DE PEZARS in 1348; and which may be considered as the foundation of the French academy, afterwards so celebrated; though not its origin, for CHARLEMAGNE established an academy for science and literature in general on his return from ITALY in 781.

These names make but a part, as we are told, though one should suppose a considerable part of the principal inventors, as they are called, or poets in FRANCE; and the surrounding nations and provinces, where the French language was either correctly or imperfectly spoken. The principal service these authors have rendered to the cause of literature is in leaving us an idea of the manner of those

times in which they lived; but these were so barbarous and unpolished, that their labours serve more to point out what ought to be avoided than what ought to be imitated as far as it relates to their choice of subjects; and, if we should go further and fairly look into their works as an object of criticism, though we should find anecdotes and short histories recounted with neatness and simplicity, and remarkable for the truth of their images, and the elegance of their style; yet the gross indecency, the barbarity, and crudeness of the rest, would render the task of selection scarcely worth the pains; of so little value would be the gold, after it were extracted from the filthy concrete in which it is enveloped.

This chapter ought not to be finished without a notice that it is impossible, from the contradictions of various authors, to be correct to a year, or, perhaps, to twenty years, as to when these poets wrote. The same circumstance is frequently related differently, and sometimes one circumstance is mistaken for another. For one instance, among many others, the four daughters of BERENGER, Count of PROVENCE, it is agreed upon on all hands, married four kings, but one author will insist upon it, that one of the husbands was RICHARD CŒUR DE LION, who, by the way, was dead before the thirteenth century,

and another fixes the time of the birth of BERENGER at the year 1245, which is impossible, because HENRY the Third married his daughter in the year 1536. The first mistake originates, perhaps, from the name of BERENGARIA the wife of RICHARD, and the other from making 1245 the time of BERENGER's birth, instead of the time he was celebrated as a poet.

As these circumstances concern literature itself but very little, I shall always, where I find no material contradiction, set down events, as they are related, leaving it to the discretion and good sense of the reader to distinguish between what appears to be merely probable and what positively authentic.

CHAP. II.

DESCRIPTION OF THE ENTREMETS.

As the amusements called *Entremets*, because they relieved the different courses of feasts, had something in them very extraordinary it would be highly improper to pass by this opportunity of describing them.

Though we have accounts of magnificent spectacles under this title which were performed so early as the year 1200; and, again, from the chronicle of ALBERIC of an astonishing one in 1237, on the marriage of ROBERT, brother of St. LOUIS, with MAHAUT, Countess of ARTOIS, and daughter of the Duke of BRABANT, besides many others, I should exceed the bounds I have prescribed for myself did I particularly notice more than two or three of the most remarkable.

I shall, therefore, carry the attention of the reader to that magnificent and extraordinary spectacle performed in honour of ISABELLA of BAVARIA,

queen to CHARLES VI. which was solemnized at PARIS with the utmost splendor, in October 1385. Among the fetes upon this occasion was a combat performed before the trinity, illustrative of the holy war. The French and English fought against, and, of course, beat the Saracens, in presence of the queen. All the streets were laid with carpets, several fountains were placed in different situations, which ran with wine and other delicious liquors, and upon lofty stages erected for the purpose, were placed choirs of musicians, organs, and youths who represented different parts of the ancient testament.

Machines were contrived, by means of which infants, dressed to represent angels, descended and placed flowers and ornaments on the head of the queen; but the most astonishing part of the spectacles was the intrepidity of a man who glided down by a cord from the spire of NOTRE DAME to the bridge where the queen was to pass, and placed a crown upon her head, which having effected, he returned by the way he came, as if ascending to heaven. This extraordinary tour was the invention of a Genoese, who had been a long time contriving it; and what contributed to render it the more remarkable, even at a distance from PARIS, being very late in the evening, the man

carried a flambeau in each hand, that both the beauty and the temerity of the action might be the more striking.

In 1453, according to the accounts of MATHIEU DE COUCI, and OLIVER DE LA MARCHE, ADOLPHUS, Count of CLEVES, gave a spectacle of this kind at LISLE, in FLANDERS, in an immense hall filled with tables, or rather with vast theatres. In one of these was placed a bark with the sails furled, in which was seen a chevalier armed *cap a pie*. Before the bark was placed a silver swan with a golden collar and chain, with which it seemed to tow the vessel along, and near at hand a castle appeared to rise out of the waves on which a falcon was perched.

These different objects were emblematic of a trait of ancient history relative to the house of CLEVES, in which it is reported that a swan traversing the RHINE, led, miraculously to the castle of that family, a chevalier, celebrated by his exploits, who became the husband of the princess of the country, and gave an heir to that ancient and illustrious house, whose title would otherwise have become extinct.

The same year, when MAHOMET the Second, menaced CONSTANTINOPLE, the emperor CON-

STANTINE, the last christian prince that reigned in the East, demanded succour from all the princes of his religion; and, among others, from PHILIP the Good, then duke of BURGUNDY. PHILIP flattered with this attention, replied ostentatiously to CON-STANTINE, that he should prepare a crusade himself. And to effect this he instantly assembled his provincial generals, and the commanders of his vessels, to whom he gave a grand feast, at which was performed a magnificent *entremets*.

Among the different objects introduced in this astonishing entertainment was a church filled with singers, whose voices were accompanied by bells; a vessel fitted with all sorts of merchandise; a superb fountain, with ornaments in glass and lead so wonderfully constructed as to represent trees, flowers, verdure, stones of all colours, and a figure of St. ANDREW with his cross, from which issued a fountain which fell at his feet and lost itself in a beautiful declivity covered with flowers; and an enormous pie which represented a castle and concealed eight musicians. On the battlements of the castle was seen a serpent, and at the base were two fountains, from which issued orange flower water which filled the fosses.

After this was seen a wind-mill with a magpie

perched on it; two tuns, from one of which flowed a sweet liquor, and from the other a bitter one; on each of these as placed a statue holding a label with these words, "Take your choice."

Then came a view of a desert; a tyger fighting with a serpent; a savage upon a camel; a peasant beating the bushes from which flew a thousand birds; a chevalier entertaining his dulcinea under a hedge of roses; a satyr mocking a shepherdess crossed in love; a madman upon the back of a bear; and a number of other strange and incongruous objects.

In another place was a lake surrounded with villages and castles; and further off an impervious forest embellished with oriental trees, and filled with a croud of animals of every kind so natural that they seemed alive. In a niche were placed vases of gold enriched with precious stones, where sat the figure of a woman made out of the same materials, from whose nipples issued a delicious beverage; a lion was placed by her side chained to a column, on which was written, "Touch not the lady."

After this the company were entertained with

the exploits of JASON, who drenched the bulls that guarded the golden fleece with the contents of MEDEA's vial, and employed her marvellous ring to cut off the head and draw the teeth of the serpent; after which, he sowed the teeth in the earth; armed men instantly rose up *cap a pie*, who massacred one another, and all these scenes were accompanied, sometimes, by the singers in the church, and sometimes by the instruments in the pie.

But this was not all. A giant now appeared dressed and armed like a Saracen conducting an elephant who carried on his back a castle, in which sat a lady dressed like a devotee, and appearing most deplorable and wretched. She thundered an anathema against the giant, which obliged him to stop. This lady represented religion. She complained most bitterly of the ills she had sustained through the tyranny of the infidels, and lamented the tardiness of those who ought to have flown to deliver her.

This lamentation finished, an armed chief preceded by a long string of knights of the golden fleece, and bearing upon his fist a pheasant ornamented with a collar of gold enriched with diamonds and pearls, advanced to the Duke of BURGUNDY

and presented two ladies, one of whom represented YOLANDE, his natural daughter, and the other ISABELLA of NEUFCHATEL, daughter of the Seigneur DE MONTAIGN. Each of these ladies was accompanied by a knight, and the armed chief offered the bird to the duke in the name of the ladies, whom he recommended to the protection of their sovereign*.

The duke of BURGUNDY, after listening attentively to the request of the armed chief, held out to him a scroll, which was immediately read aloud, and contained a solemn vow to GOD, to the VIRGIN, to the ladies, and to the pheasant, that he would carry war into the territory of the infidels in defence of the oppressed church. The duke's vow became

* This ceremony, says my author, was used that the duke might conform to those ancient customs, according to which princes and noblemen were presented at grand feasts and magnificent assemblies with a peacock, or some other noble bird, to induce those vows, which were made upon those occasions, to redress the wrongs of such ladies as implored their assistance. This last ceremony was called the Vow of the Peacock, which bird was employed, or when it could not be easily procured, a pheasant, because the grandeur, the beauty, and the variety of the plumage of these birds represented the majesty, the beneficence, and the power of kings, as well as those superb dresses in which great men were decked at the Cour Pleniére.

immediately a signal for his whole court, every member of which, to an infinite number, instantly vowed the destruction of the Turks, all which acclamation was accompanied as before by the inhabitants of the steeple and the pie, and when this ceremony was over a new groupe of characters presented themselves.

A lady dressed in white, in a religious habit, and carrying on her shoulder a scroll, on which was written, "Thank God," entered and paid her acknowledgements to the assembly; which done she introduced twelve other ladies, representing different virtues, who were to accompany these knights of the cross to the holy war as their tutelary guardians. Their names, which they bore on their shoulders, were Faith, Charity, Justice, Reason, Prudence, Temperance, Fortitude, Truth, Liberality, Diligence, Hope, and Vigilance.

These passed in review; and, after they had been acknowledged by the knights as the companions of their voyage, a most extravagant dance, full of mummery, and accompanied by musical instruments, bells, drums, clashing of swords, and other monstrous and deafening sounds finished

the entertainment; after which they grew intoxicated at the feast, where many of the valorous knights who had sworn to massacre the Saracens at the gates of JERUSALEM, were either killed or wounded in this drunken frolic at PARIS.

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CHAP III.

DESCRIPTION OF THE MYSTERIES.

IN proportion as chivalry left FRANCE for the HOLY LAND, so a taste for the entremets fell off; and, when the knights of the cross returned from JERUSALEM, they were so full of adventures that the priests thought they could not do better than turn those adventures to the advantage of the church, or rather of themselves.

Conscious, however, that a mere relation of that mad business would have but a disgraceful effect, they soon ceased to sing the exploits of kingly priests and sacerdotal generals, and contented themselves with acting sacred history, and personifying divine characters.

For this purpose they formed themselves into a society, but not being rich enough to buy ground, much less to build a theatre on it, they first made proselytes of some of the most opulent tradesmen

in PARIS, and afterwards had the condescension to accept of their money and property, by which means they carried their scheme into execution.

They chose for their scene of action the Bourg of St. MAUR DES-FOSSÉS near PARIS, which had been rendered celebrated by the number of pilgrims who resorted there from motives of devotion. The first mystery that was performed by this society was called *The History of the Death of our Saviour*, and from this circumstance they gave themselves the name of *The Confraternity of the Passion*.

The followers of this species of amusement were, as we are told, in number beyond all belief. Business was so at a stand, and every public concern neglected for the pleasure of running after this novelty to such a degree, that, in 1298, the prévôt of the capital issued an interdiction to suppress the pious farces of these holy actors. The interest of the priests however was paramount to that of the prévôt; nay the interference of that magistrate was ultimately of service to them; for, upon petitioning the king to take off the interdiction, they were invited to perform before him, and he was so delighted with the poetry and the acting, that, in 1402, he established them at PARIS by his own letters patent, after which it was even fashionable to become members

of this fraternity; for we find that several of the king's household, nay, the king himself, did not disdain to make a part of the company.

The hospital of the trinity, which had been founded in 1100 for the reception of pilgrims, was now converted into a theatre for the representation of these mysteries. The theatre was wonderfully well constructed for the purpose of giving effect to the performances. The front was much in the style of ours, but the stage was upon a very different principal, being intended to convey an idea of all objects as truly as it was possible to exhibit them. Heaven, earth, and hell were their three principal objects, which they contrived to represent with great facility. If the scene was to be heaven, convolutions of clouds to an immense height and extent surrounded the stage, on which angels appeared flying or walking as it best suited to carry on the amusement; if earth, the extremity of the theatre seemed an immense expanse, on which, at proper distances, objects appeared as in nature; and, if hell, the whole stage was lifted up like the jaw of a monstrous dragon representing a tremendous abyss, and out of the mouth, which vomited fire, came legions of devils.

Though the Passion of our Saviour was the first

piece performed by this fraternity, which very possibly was originally written many hundred years before, for no one has pretended to name the author of it, three cotemporary poets of the thirteenth century, whose writings were deposited among the manuscripts of CHARLES the Sixth, seem to have furnished the materials for this brotherhood to work upon.

Those poets were called RUTEBEUF, BODEL, and ADAM DE LA HALLE; and, among the most celebrated of their pieces, which were all mysteries, we find *The Prodigal Son*, *The Miracle of Theophilus*, *The Crusades*, and *St. Nicholas*, and *The Children in the Tub*. These three poets had their imitators to the number of fifty or sixty, some vestiges of whose works we have imperfect accounts of. They consist of subjects from scripture put into action, and contain, among a heap of rubbish, some literary jewels of considerable value.

It is impossible to deny that these writers were strongly possessed with a true knowledge of the dramatic art; for, where the subjects, though scriptural, are purely domestic and simple, and have no reference to religion beyond fair and naked morality, we find for such times many of the requisites that

compose a regular piece calculated to convey amusement and instruction.

One of these is, *The Prodigal Son*, written by RUTEBEUF, so early as 1240. A story, which if we divest ourselves for a moment of having read it in the New Testament as a parable, has nothing to do with religion in any other respect than as it is a beautiful lesson of morality.

RUTEBEUF chuses to throw into his piece all the nature and simplicity he possibly can; and, therefore, feigning to forget, or really forgetting that his business was to write a religious mystery, he places his scene in a beautiful country, and makes his characters opulent labourers, a people of all others, who are naturally strangers to artificial as well as real want.

Thus in the *Prodigal Son* has he given a most beautiful picture of the restlessness of human nature. Blest with health and strength, and assured of every rational blessing for only the trouble of earning it—and what bread is so sweet as that we earn—He makes it the business of his life to run counter to reason. He torments his father in return for his unbounded indulgence, and hates his brother be-

cause he is good and dutiful; till, at length, he demands his patrimony and determines to seek his fortune.

Turned loose in that world of whose inhabitants and manners he has no knowledge, the prodigal son is not more delighted and astonished than he is ashamed and confounded. The compliments he receives on his wit, his grace, and his good sense, though he knows them to be false he admits as if they were true. Nay, he begins at last to fancy himself perfectly accomplished; and, under this idea, is more angry with his father and his brother than ever, who wanted him to consider himself as a clown and to linger out his life in obscurity. But the delusion does not last long. He goes to an inn where the landlord and waiters fly at his orders. A lady enters, he falls in love with her, the dinner is served, wine and music succeed, in the midst of which another lady is introduced, and he has the inexpressible pleasure of seeing himself an object of contention between the two ladies. He appeases them, and assures them he is in love with them both. By this time they, beginning to be tired with their farce, or rather interested in bringing on the denouement, make him drunk as fast as possible, pick his pockets, share the booty with the landlord, and

decamp, leaving him asleep. He afterwards wakes, discovers his loss, and while he is raving about like one distracted, the landlord brings the bill, and finding his guest has no money kicks him out of the house.

We next see the prodigal son a beggar on the highway. His miseries have now made him contrite, and he recalls to his mind with tears the indulgence and the advice of his father. He thinks of his brother, who by industry and frugality is in abundance, while he through his profligacy is starving for want. In this wretched plight a peasant touched with his misfortunes takes him to his hovel and sets him to take care of his pigs. In this situation he has time for reflection, and at length his repentance is confirmed, when he resolves to return to his father, who receives him with tenderness, and the reconciliation takes place exactly as in the parable.

We have here a regular piece. This is no mystery from scripture. It is plain self evident morality. It is a picture of human life such as it ever has been and ever will be; and, as to the poetical requisites, it is full of them. It consists of a single fable, simple, and grand. It has beginning, middle, and end; and there is not a circumstance throughout the whole but inculcates some moral

instruction. It is true RUTEBEUF does not seem to have read ARISTOTLE, but he had read nature, which answered his purpose better; and, if other authors had paid the scripture no worse a compliment than bringing it on the stage with so fair and so honest a motive—for what store can we so properly search to find moral instruction—the mysteries so far from profaning scripture, would have honoured it.

As far as these mysteries were considered as a vehicle for poetry, there is something in them awful and majestic. To give an idea of this let us turn our thoughts to MILTON's *Paradise Lost*, and then suppose this poem put into dialogue, and acted on the stage; which is the strongest case in point that can be imagined. What would be the consequence? The characters, which, while the reader's fancy is fired with the glowing imagery of the poet, are sacred and sublime, would sink into the most miserable burlesque if attempted to be personified; and this bathos would be still more complete in proportion to the beauty of the poetry.

Fortunately, though to be sure it is a left handed advantage, there was very little in the poetry of these mysteries to drive it into any such predicament. It was miserable enough, God knows; but, in return, that the priests might be sure to incur their rightful

portion of reprehension, the matter was not only the most sacred that could be chosen, but the most dangerous to expose to ridicule ; for when we consider that such subjects were performed on the stage as the Conception of the Virgin MARY, the Passion of CHRIST, and the Resurrection, the mind is offended to a degree of outrage, and we condemn that country where such an impiety was tolerated, and those priests who connived at it.

The mystery of the Conception is composed in fifty three acts, distributed historically, and traced all the way from the prophecy of ISAIAH, to the death of the Innocents; and, without mentioning the chorusses, has at least a hundred characters.

To go over the plot would be to reiterate all we have read on the subject in the New Testament, which is on the stage tediously spun out in four feet verse, with now and then a few awkward Alexandrines, perpetually fishing for the sublime, and catching the bathos. The joy of the human race on the coming of the MESSIAH is truly poetical; so is the discomfiture of the devils; but if it had not been larded with the jokes of the landlord of the inn at BETHELEM, who is very facecious with MARY about the groaning, and the devils putting new bolts and bars upon limbo for fear our SAVIOUR should

let out ADAM and EVE, it would not have been seasoned to the palates of the priests.

The jests also of those who are employed by HEROD to murder the Innocents with the leave of the holy fathers, might as well have been spared; nor can we forgive the devils, after they have tempted HEROD with so many flattering promises of reward, for instigating him to cut his throat, and afterwards kicking his soul about till they are tired, and then enjoying the pleasure of seeing it bubble in a furnace of molten lead.

There are a hundred other absurdities, the mildest epithet that can be given them, and yet this strange incongruous farago is excelled in point of impiety, meant for sanctity, in the Passion, which begins with a sermon by way of prologue; and yet more in the Resurrection, which finishes with a figure dance between ADAM, EVE, ISAIAH, JEREMIAH, JOHN the Baptist, the Good Thief crucified with CHRIST, and an immense number of other souls, whom the coming of the MESSIAH had liberated from limbo.

These mysteries, having obtained incredible reputation in the capital, were very soon spread throughout the kingdom. ROUEN, ANGERS, LE

MANS, METZ, and almost every principal town had to boast a company of strollers deputed from the confraternity. VILLON, the poet, who is said to have written several mysteries, became very busy upon this occasion as an itinerant. We are told by RABELAIS, that having retired to his friend the Abbe St. MAIXENT, near POITOU, VILLON was very anxious to amuse the inhabitants of that place with the Passion of Our SAVIUR in the Poitevin dialect *.

* RABELAIS relates a matter full of pleasantry and extravagance, of this attempt of VILLON to establish religious mysteries through the medium of the theatre. I give it merely to shew the singular and grotesque manner of those times, and the author who celebrated them. He says, that after VILLON had distributed the parts, and the actors had rehearsed two or three times, he prevailed on the mayor and the other magistrates to suffer the representation of the piece. There was nothing now wanting but the dresses, and though they tried their utmost, they could not find any thing fine enough for the *Almighty*, who had always, in these sort of pieces, been introduced personally on the stage. VILLON knew that at the convent of CORDELIERS they had a magnificent *habe*, which it was usual to wear upon *Holy Thursday*, and other religious occasions. But the Superior of the convent refused very abruptly to lend it, for he said that the provincial statutes forbade them to lend any thing to the theatre which was the house of *Satan*. VILLON maintained that the law regarded only such pieces as were profane, and not those which contributed to the edification of the public.—His arguments, however, were of no use; he was sent away without his errand. Having made known to the company his bad success, they were one and all determined to be revenged.

To put their design into execution, one day when the *Sacristan*

The prodigious number of these entertainments it will be here impossible to give a correct account of. It may not be anifs, however, to notice yet some few particulars concerning them.

ARNOT GREBAN, canon of MANS, wrote the mystery of the Acts of the Apostles. The title ran thus: "The Triumphant Mystery of Catholic Works in the Acts of the Apostles taken from St. LUKE, evangelist and historiographer." Another of these curious pieces was called the History of the Old Testament—This was the title, "The Old Testament, in which is shewn how the children of ISRAEL passed the Red Sea and reached the Land of Promise, with several other histories such as JOB, TOBIT, DANIEL, SUSANNAH, and HESTER."

A third has, for its title, "The Vengeance of CHRIST in the destruction of JERUSALEM, ex-

went on his mule to collect charity for the convent, they hid themselves in a wood, arrayed in the most horrible disguises, and carrying in their hands cracked bells and flambeaux, which they rendered more disonant and hideous by the addition of cow's horns and large crackers. In this trim, they all on a sudden fell upon the poor *Sacristan*, crying, "Oh the nasty villain of a monk, who would not lend God the Father a cape." The poor superior, half dead with fear, confessed that it was very sinful, but it was the practice of the convent to borrow every thing and lend nothing.

“ ecuted by VESPASIAN and his son TITUS;
“ contained in several Roman chronicles in the reign
“ of NERO, and other fine histories in honour of our
“ SAVIOUR and the court of Paradise.” A fourth
is called “ The Mystery of the Patience of JOB,
“ and how he lost all his wealth by war, and by
“ fortune; how he was reduced to the greatest
“ poverty, and how every thing was rendered back
“ again by the grace of GOD.”

A fifth was entitled “ The Sacrifice of ABRA-
“ HAM.” I take the literal words. It is thus recom-
mended: “ This is a French tragedy, necessary to
“ all christians that they may find consolation in
“ times of tribulation and adversity.”

This piece no more resembled a tragedy than any of the preceding ones; but it appeared at a time when the mysteries began to tire. Therefore the author, though he could no farther innovate than to change the description of the piece, was determined to do what he could. The mysteries, which formerly took each of them four days in the performance, began now to be considerably compressed; and, wherever any familiar circumstances occurred, they were considered as properer for the stage than those more sacred subjects which were profaned enough by the ceremonies of the

church. Nay, it is not very clear that the authors, who were now principally laical, did not attempt as far as they safely could to burlesque these holy subjects, by way of bringing them into contempt; for we find about this time such titles as *The Joyous Mystery of the Three Kings*; and *The Pleasant conceit of the Apocalypse of St. John of Zebadee*, “in which are contained the visions and revelations of the said St. JOHN in the island of PATMOS.”

Thus much has been said to give an idea of the genius, the manners, the art, and the language of French poetry in those times. I shall now, as briefly as possible, go on to those amusements called moralities which succeeded the mysteries.

CHAP. IV.

DESCRIPTION OF THE MORALITIES AND OTHER
ENTERTAINMENTS.

THE tragedy of *Abraham*, and another called *The Discomfiture of the Giant Goliath*, seem to have struck hard at the mysteries in FRANCE; for, encouraged by the first effort at innovation, there shortly appeared a piece with the following title: *The Mystery of the Destruction of Troy the Great*. “The Rape of HELEN, done by PARIS, and composed in good French rhyme; together with the prowess, the virtues, and the nobleness of the valiant HECTOR; the damnable treason committed by the Greeks, and many other histories containing all the transactions between the Trojans and the Grecians.”

This heathen mystery excited as much curiosity as had the religious tragedy: Curiosity begat controversy; and, the schism once sown, especially as it had reason to nourish it, the mysteries were quite at a stand. At last the priests yielded with the best grace they could, and the general title of pieces for

the theatre no longer assumed the term mystery, but morality.

It was difficult, however, to draw a line as a criterion for the regulation of so wide a field; and, therefore, the subjects were sometimes holy, and sometimes profane; but, as their general tendency was morality, every thing was permitted.

A Pilot, by name JOHN PARMÉNTIER, supposed to be the first european who ever set foot in AFRICA, wrote a morality in honour of the Assumption; a Cardinal wrote a choice morality called *The Reformation of Taverns and Alehouses, and the Destruction of Gluttony*; and the Valet de Chambre of LOUIS the Twelfth, wrote a morality which he called *The Just Man, and the Man of this World*, by which he meant the personification of virtue and vice; and he so completely wound up his plot, that the just man was sent first to purgatory and afterwards to heaven, while the devils ran away with the soul of the man of this world.

A physician, of an honest cast than the physicians afterwards ridiculed by MOLIERE, wrote three moralities, entitled, *The Road to Health, The Government of the Human Frame, and A Prohibition of an Indulgence of the passions.*

LOUISA L'ABBÉ, born at LYONS, and called the French Sappho, at the age of fifteen followed her lover in men's cloaths to the siege of PE PIGNAN; and, afterwards, when she had returned and married the man of her heart, wrote a morality called *The Folly of Love*. She is said to have written poetry in four languages, and her house was a sort of academy for the literati of her time.

But the Prodigal Son of RUTEBEUF became now the great object of imitation. It was performed with material alterations, and it produced as many imitations of it as there were in ENGLAND of the *Beggars Opera*. Scarcely an instance of filial piety or ingratitude could be invented but presently it was brought on the stage in the shape of a morality. The subjects of one or two are worth attending to.

The Poor Villager, "written in praise and honour of honest girls," made its appearance the year after the Prodigal Son was revived. The story is brief. A seigneur of a village endeavours to corrupt his vassal's daughter; and finding all his arts useless, is determined to have recourse to violence. In this situation, the poor girl promises to consent upon condition previously of speaking to her father. The lord suspicious of every thing is

determined to overhear the conversation, and having effected his scheme without her knowledge, he is witness to her imploring her father, in the most earnest manner, to cut off her head rather than let her chastity be violated. Struck with remorse the lord entreats her forgiveness, gives her and her father their freedom, and loads them with benefits.

Another has for its title, *The Ungrateful Son*, who is so completely the darling of his parents that they absolutely ruin themselves to make his fortune. After a time they are overwhelmed with poverty, and he is rolling in riches; and, when they have recourse to him as the only benefactor they know where to fly to, he treats them most wantonly unnatural, not even permitting them, though they are starving, to eat of a repast on which he is feasting. The father, seeing him treat the mother contemptuously, can forbear no longer; but, lifting his hands and eyes to heaven, curses him and implores the vengeance of God upon his head. Scarcely has he uttered this curse but a monstrous toad comes out of a pye and flies at his face which it completely covers, attaching itself so closely that no human art can remove it. The unnatural son begins now to relent, and the parents, too ready to forgive, listen to his contrition. He is, however, informed that prayer alone can expiate his guilt;

they, therefore, send him about from priest to priest, afterwards to the bishop, and at last to the pope; and, by the time he has expended almost his whole fortune, he is relieved by exorcism and exhortation from the frightful reptile and reconciled to his parents.

This piece was followed by another called *The Morality of the Child of Perdition*, "who killed his father, hanged his mother, and afterwards went mad." But these instances are enough to shew the distinction between the mysteries and the moralities; which were the only regular dramatic attractions of the times. We are erroneously informed that the clerks of the Bazoche established a theatre where the beauty of virtue, and the hideousness of vice were personified; but the fact is that these clerks were no more than the laymen who gave the first blow to the mysteries, and who afterwards, in conjunction, or rather by the connivance of the priests, performed the moralities at the established theatre, the priests being too cunning to shut out any opportunity of bolstering up their own reputation, which at that time began to decline.

We are told of a theatrical society called *Les Enfants de Sans Souci*; but these cannot be regularly classed, being no more than a number of

young men of fortune and family who ran after pleasure, and stuck at nothing to procure it. In consequence of pursuing this career many of them were ruined; and, having talents, they turned their thoughts to the stage for a livelihood. They were many of them scholars; and, being out of humour with the world, they walked in the footsteps of ARISTOPHANES, and in their pieces lashed the manners of their time.

This new species of amusement succeeded, and the interest of the Confraternity began again to be menaced. These children of Sans Souci were, therefore, invited to join the regular theatre in the same manner as the brotherhood had invited the moralists; and thus, this insatiate vortex, from which, perhaps, originated the idea of the Parson's Barn, swallowed up every thing that came in its way. The stage, however, having gradually gone from mysteries to moralities, from moralities to farces, from farces to the grossest buffooneries, and very frequently a mixture of them all, the government took away the theatre from the confraternity, and in the year 1539, the house of the trinity became an hospital according to its original institution.

FRANCIS the First having accorded the brotherhood, letters patent confirming all the privileges they enjoyed under CHARLES the Sixth, they now

fought for some new place of establishment; and, for that purpose, hired the Hotel de Flandres, where they performed four years; but the king ordered the demolition of this hotel, and several others near it, and our holy actors were as far to seek as ever.

Tired with the considerable expences they had incurred by transporting their theatrical trappings from place to place, they resolved to build upon their own foundation. They, therefore, bought some ground on which had stood the hotel of the duke of BURGUNDY, and there they erected their fourth theatre, which consisted of a hall and other edifices, many of which are now to be seen.

The parliament, upon strong solicitation, gave them permission to establish themselves there upon condition they performed none but profane subjects; but nevertheless, such as tended to promote the practice of morality.

The Confraternity of the Passion, who professed piety, could not content themselves with performing subjects purely profane, and, therefore, in the year 1588, they let their theatre to a troop of French comedians who had just then formed, with a view of performing under the permission of the king. The pieces, now exhibited, began to be a little more

supportable than those of the *Confraternity of the Passion*. By degrees the public taste became more extended and more pure. Printing being invented in the reign of Louis the Ninth, and literature considerably more established under Francis the First, books, of course, became common, different languages were generally learnt, and these improvements introduced translations of the tragedies and comedies of the ancients.

CHAP. V.

FROM THE COMMENCEMENT OF TRAGEDY TO
THE TIME OF HARDY.

THOUGH Jodelle is generally considered as the Æschylus and the Livius Andronicus of France, yet the introduction of tragedy is certainly owing to Lazare Baif, a gentleman of Angevin, who was educated by the celebrated Budé. Baif travelled to form his heart and his understanding. At Rome he studied Greek under the learned Musurus; and after he had accomplished every intelligence he thought necessary for his purpose, he retired to his estate at Anjou to lose himself in study.

Francis the First, however, unwilling that such talents should be lost to the world, drew him from obscurity and sent him ambassador to Venice, where he fell in love with a young lady of condition, by whom he had several children. Returned to Paris, he was promoted by the king to some honourable and lucrative situations, and the first use

he made of his learning was to translate such works as might be serviceable to the state.

The task, however, in which he most delighted was translating SOPHOCLES and EURIPIDES. The tragedy of *Electra* containing, according to its title, the inhuman and truly piteous death of AGAMEMNON by his wicked wife CLYTEMNESTRA, and his cruel adulterer EGYSTHUS, was published at PARIS in the year 1537.

This tragedy that the French might clearly comprehend the nature of Greek poetry, BAIF translated verse for verse; consequently the style is barbarous enough. But he translated afterwards the *Hecuba* of EURIPIDES in a more liberal manner, intending it for the edification of his children. It was printed in 1550, dedicated to HENRY the Second, and it is spoken of as an ingenious work.

THOMAS SIBILET, about the same time, published a translation of the *Iphigenia* of EURIPIDES, and other authors are spoken of who emulated BAIF. The French, nevertheless, consider JODELLE as the founder of tragedy; for they say that these translations only serve to point out, at a distance, the road that dramatic writers ought to follow. But this is only general opinion. "JODELLE," says the

duke de VALLIERE, "was the first who had the
 " boldness to bring forward a tragedy of his own
 " invention. It was called *Cleopatra Captive*, and
 " published in 1552; but it was a servile imitation
 " of the cut and form of the Greek theatre, and
 " yet he has the glory to pass for the inventor of
 " French tragedy." But let us examine him.

ETIENNE JODELLE, lord of LIMODIN, was born at PARIS in 1532, of a family illustrious both by birth and by talents. The delight he took in studying the works of the Greeks and the Romans, induced him to lament that the stage had remained so long in a barbarous state, and that some superior genius had not introduced SOPHOCLES and MENANDER, SENECA, and TERENCE, into FRANCE. But how to manage? The confraternity were too intent upon deceiving the people to consent to such a dramatic revolution. JODELLE had influence, and having constructed his *Cleopatra* upon the Greek model, he procured a theatre to be prepared in the court-yard of the hotel of RHEIMS, where his tragedy was performed before HENRY the Second, and a large concourse of spectators, with the most extravagant applause.

JODELLE, being then only twenty, and remarkably handsome, undertook to perform the part of

Cleopatra. He also spoke the prologue, which was a compliment to the king, and in it he adroitly insinuated that the Muses, having flown from GREECE to FRANCE, implored the protection of so great a monarch.

This piece is opened by the ghost of ANTONY, who complains that the gods, jealous of his valour and glory when living, had connived with CUPID to render him a slave to a passion that terminated his life; and, not contented with this, they had made him become odious to the Romans by provoking him to turn his wife and children out of doors. Since, however, matters are so, this ghost seems determined to keep up the idea of all for love; and, therefore, appears to CLEOPATRA in a dream and advises her rather to kill herself than be led in triumph and chained to the chariot of CÆSAR. The ghost, out of regard, probably, to the rules of ARISTOTLE, enjoins her to meet him in the shades in less than twenty-four hours.

The chorus, at the end of the first act, sing the instability of human wishes, the fall of TROY once so glorious, the wretchedness of MEDEA at the loss of JASON; and, at length, advert to the rose that lasts but a day, and apply their remarks to the unhappy fate of ANTONY and CLEOPATRA.

In the second act, CÆSAR enjoys the idea of CLEOPATRA'S captivity. In the third he has an interview with CLEOPATRA, who threatens to kick him and he runs away. In the fourth she kills herself; and in the fifth they deplore her death. PROCULLUS exclaims "Never did the light of heaven discover so frightful a day for EGYPT. I found her," says he, "in her royal habit and her crown, stretched dead and pale, on a rich bed painted and gilt. ERAS, her woman, lay dead at her feet, CHARMION yet breathed, but life was leaving her. Was this nobly done?" said I. "Yes," cried the faithful CHARMION, "it was nobly done; and every succeeding king of EGYPT shall bear testimony of it. This said, she staggered, fell, and died."

I considered it necessary to say so much of this tragedy as it was looked up to as the *chef d'œuvre* of its time, and a model for every thing that was to succeed it. Its reception encouraged JOUELLE to go on, and he soon after produced *The Sacrifice of Dido*, taken as closely as possible from the *Æneid* of VIRGIL, which had considerable success; and after that a comedy called *Eugene; or the Rencounter*, which are supposed to make up the whole of his dramatic works, for they are printed, together with some miscellanies of his, in one volume in 1574.

He appears, however, to have left behind him something more in manuscript ; for DE LA MOTTE says, “ I have the tragedies and comedies of JO-
“ DELLE in my possession, some finished, some hung
“ upon the hooks ; these were commanded either by
“ the queen, or madame, the king’s sister ; but were
“ deferred on account of the troublesome times.” DE LA MOTTE also speaks of him as a man of universal knowledge, and greatly esteemed by all ranks of people.

A number of dramatic authors followed JODELLE with various success ; but no single effort proved any thing equal to the model from which they copied, till, in GARNIER, JODELLE found a most powerful rival. There is something so very extraordinary in the particulars of that man’s life that I shall briefly relate them.

ROBERT GARNIER was born at FERTE BERNARD, in LE MAINE. He was intended for the law, the study of which profession he very little regarded, his inclination leading him wholly to elegant and classical literature. It was not, however, till after JODELLE had obtained considerable reputation that GARNIER was known as a poet ; but as soon as his name came fairly before the public, he

was considered as a French SOPHOCLES, born to eclipse their ÆSCHYLUS, JODELLE*.

The report of his fame soon reached the court; and CHARLES the Ninth was very anxious to attach him to his service; but he preferred the comfort and tranquility he enjoyed in the bosom of his family, to the anxiety and uneasiness attendant on the followers of kings. HENRY the Second made another attempt to entice him to court, alluring him with large offers to forward his fortune. He had, however, the courage to resist this second temptation, and pronounced upon this occasion as he had upon the other, a harangue of thanks which proved him a good orator, a true philosopher, an excellent poet, and a zealous citizen.

He was, nevertheless, prevailed upon by his friends for the good of his country, which stood in need at that time of every honest man's assistance, to accept a charge in the grand council of the nation; and, for this purpose, he established himself at PARIS. He had not been long in the capital with his wife and his children, whom he tenderly

* To make this similitude more perfect, he began his career with gaining a prize at the Feasts of FLORA, established in PROVENCE for the encouragement of poetry.

loved, when the plague almost desolated that city by its ravages. This was about 1580; and, in addition to the danger he had to apprehend to himself and his family, a most horrible plot was devised against him by his servants, who formed the monstrous and dreadful project, for the purpose of plundering the house, of poisoning him, his wife, and his children, under an idea that their several deaths might be laid upon the plague.

This shocking plot was detected and its perpetrators convicted and punished; but it operated on poor GARNIER and his family, only as a lingering death instead of an instant one; for, no sooner had the wife of GARNIER lifted the poison to her lips, by which means the discovery was made, but she felt its cruel effects; and though every assistance was given, her she fell into a weakness and a langour that at length terminated her life. GARNIER survived her but a short time, leaving his inconsolable children to the care of friends indeed, but without a father or a mother.

His tragedies, eight in number, are evidently imitations of the Greek and Latin poets. He has chosen subjects suitable to the times in which he wrote, and calculated to inspire horror at those civil wars with which FRANCE was convulsed during

his life. This he considered to be his duty as a poet and a patriot; and while his zeal in the cause of his country added animation to his genius, he at once wrote lessons for the conduct of his countrymen, and examples for the enlargement of their understandings.

“ No pieces,” says his biographer, “ were at that time equal to those of GARNIER. His subjects are noble, his personages are great characters, his style is harmonious, and sometimes energetic. The critics, however, have reproached him with preferring the manner of SENECA to that of SOPHOCLES and EURIPIDES, and to have given in dialogue, which should be as near to nature as possible, sometimes the familiarity of epistle, sometimes the epic pomp of the epopœia, sometimes the pindaric flights of ode, and sometimes the pastoral images of eclogue. In a word, to have forged new expressions, chequered with Greek and Latin; but, in spite of these faults,” continues this writer, “ GARNIER will always hold a considerable rank as a dramatic poet.”

CHAP. VI.

FROM HARDY TO CORNEILLE.

FROM GARNIER to HARDY, comprehending almost the last half of the sixteenth century, FRANCE produced many authors, some of whom were men of original invention; but far the greatest part were either translators, or imitators of the ancients, or else of their cotemporaries in other countries. I shall not, therefore, speak particularly of any of these, for they were remarkable for nothing but their strict conformity to the bad taste and puerility of many of those who had gone before them.

To keep this matter, therefore, as interesting as possible, it will be better altogether to pass by this dramatic chasm, and come at once to HARDY; who, by his astonishing fecundity, by the new character and particular conduct of his tragedies, some of which are now to be procured, certainly wrought a remarkable epoch in the history of the French drama.

ALEXANDER HARDY was born at PARIS, but it is very uncertain in what year, who were his parents, or how he passed his youth. All we certainly know is, that about the year 1600, he was celebrated for his dramatic talents, and at that time we find him a retainer to a strolling company, whom he, in an astonishing manner, perpetually supplied with novelty *.

His reputation, however, soon attracted the attention of the comedians of PARIS, who, at their establishment, when they came to a resolution of performing three times a week, found they could not carry their scheme effectually into execution without the association of this poet, who appeared to be so capable of furnishing continual novelty. HARDY undertook the task, and performed it with such success, that he continued their almost exclusive writer to his death, which happened sometime between 1628 and 1632; for, at the first of those dates, he was certainly alive, having at that time published himself the sixth volume of his works; and, at the latter, he was dead, for his widow was then obliged to commence a law suit against

* BAIF, JODELLE, and GARNIER, were men of family, and consequently every particular concerning them is very easy to be traced. HARDY was, very probably, the son of an actor and actresses; and, therefore, his birth, and his death, are marked with obscurity.

the managers for having shamefully rejected to fulfil their contract with him.

HARDY is said to have written eight hundred pieces. This is extremely improbable, and indeed it is very much doubted. Many authors of reputation; however, for though they seem very little to regard him, are yet anxious about his works, agree that he had an invention incredibly fertile; and, indeed, if it be true, that he almost wholly supplied the theatre for nearly thirty years; his productions must have been immense in point of number, whatever they were in point of merit.

SCUDERY, who insists that HARDY wrote eight hundred dramatic pieces, adds that he was a great man in spite of the envy that pursued him*; that, had he worked for his amusement instead of through necessity, his productions would have been inimitable, but as he unfortunately struggled with poverty, too often to the reproach of the world, an attendant on poetry, in neglecting HARDY, the age in which he lived has subscribed an indelible record of its own ignorance.

* If SCUDERY had instanced this as a proof of his being a great man nobody would have doubted him.

PERFAICT says*, that if SCUDERY for inimitable had substituted the word passable, this eulogium on HARDY would have been literally truth; adding, that one proof, not only of his merit but his influence was, that he established a regular price for dramatic pieces, which no author had ever been able to accomplish before him. "For the rest," continues PERFAICT, "it is very easy to see that
 " his subjects are without choice, or discernment,
 " that his versification is poor and low, and that
 " he has ill observed the rules of decency and
 " decorum, so essentially necessary in dramatic
 " poetry; but, with all his faults, it cannot be denied that he was born with distinguished talents;
 " which, it is to be lamented, his miserable situation
 " and his unfortunate propensity to write verse
 " so rapidly, almost deprived him of the power to
 " make an advantageous use of. It may be said
 " further, that he certainly understood effect on the
 " stage more naturally, and in a manner more perfect, than any of the poets who preceded him;
 " and he gave so new a form to the theatre at PARIS,
 " that those spectacles, which began with him to be

* There are two PERFAICTS. They were brothers, and wrote in conjunction; but all the French writers have a habit of mentioning them as if their works were written by one author; I shall, therefore, conform to it.

“ performed three times a week, before his death
 “ were performed every day.”

GUERET, in a work, entitled *The War of the Authors*, says that HARDY wrote verse with such facility, that he would often produce two thousand lines in twenty-four hours, and that, in three days, he would write a comedy, the comedians would get perfect in it, and it would appear before the public*.

FONTENELLE, speaking of HARDY, writes more soberly, “ His fecundity,” says he, “ certainly is marvellous; but then neither his verses
 “ nor the disposition of his pieces have cost him
 “ much pains. Nothing comes amiss to him. Every
 “ subject is good. Whether it is the death of
 “ ACHILLES, or a tradesman’s wife that the husband
 “ catches in adultery, it is all the same to HARDY.

* We have no certain account that HARDY wrote any comedy at all, therefore that part of GUERET’s remark is as ridiculous as the rest. Two thousand lines is equal to eighty pages, the letter the current size of this history. What writer will undertake, in a day, to copy *half* that quantity, much less invent it. Besides GUERET, in his kindness, outcalculates himself; for he not only tries to prove that HARDY was very lazy, for at this rate he might, instead of eight hundred, have written more than three thousand pieces; but he eclipses the poet in the superior merit of the actors; unless, as in the case of FALSTAFF and the prince, HARDY had the talent of inspiring the actors with his instinct.

“ Every thing is equally tragedy. Nor have manners or decorum any thing to do in the business. Now we see a prostitute in her bed who supports her character very naturally ; now we are entertained with a rape ; and, now, a married woman meets her lover at the place of assignation, and they fairly tell the audience that they are going to bed together.”

Fontenelle is also very angry with Hardy for the immorality of his expressions, which, he says, not only hurt his cause but his reputation. To call a woman a saint, is not only irreligious, but unpoetic. “ If he called her a goddess,” said Fontenelle, “ it would be perfect poetry, and the very fiction that is permitted to lovers. It is too serious to sport with truth. There are saints but there are no goddesses*.”

“ However,” continues Fontenelle, “ it must be confessed that the pieces of Hardy have not that tiresome and unsupportable tame-

* Here Fontenelle has written a satire on doctor Johnson, and a panegyric on Shakspeare. Johnson will not allow any thing mythological to be admitted into poetry. Shakspeare, who knew without a prompter the whole province of poetry, makes Juliet say, “ Swear by thy gracious self who art *the god of my idolatry*,” and I’ll believe thee.

“ nefs of the greateft part of thofe that have gone
“ before them. But this is all the merit we can
“ allow them; for, though the fubjects give them
“ fometimes greater ftrengh and intereft, the poetry
“ is not written with proportionable force.”

The reader will very readily, from thefe remarks, form a pretty correct judgment of HARDY. Certainly the French ftage has fingular obligations to him; but it is prudent, however, to obferve that, though he has general merit he has particular faults; which, to do him juftice, no one was more ready to point out than himfelf; endeavouring, at all times, in very laudable felf defence, to throw the odium on his unfortunate fituation, which obliged him to write more than he had an opportunity to correct; and this fhould feem, really, to prove that his genius and his talents were fuperior to what the world had a right to fuppoſe them *.

* To give HARDY as much fair play as poffible, let us inſtance DRYDEN; who, though he has immortalized himfelf by a fingle poem, would have left behind him by no means a brilliant fame had he written only for the ftage. Not from his want of fuperior genius and talents, but from his having been a dramatic drudge as HARDY was. I cannot, however, compliment HARDY with placing him by the fide of DRYDEN, whoſe worſt play has probably more poetry than HARDY’S beſt. I only mean to inſtance the ſimilarity of ſituation between the two men, and by that to prove, that if the ex-

As to the number of pieces written by HARDY, we know by name but of forty-one. SCUDERY, as we have seen, insists that he wrote eight hundred, and GUERET has a much higher notion of the matter; but SCUDERY is a writer who was remarkable for exaggeration, and GUERET, very probably, as his *Battle of the Authors*, like SWIFT'S *Battle of the Books*, is a satire, only meant to ridicule what he did not believe.

HARDY himself, in his preface to his works, speaks of six hundred and more; which FONTENELLE pleasantly observes, was no number at all when it is considered that his cotemporary, LOPES DE VEGA, had given to SPAIN two thousand. It should seem, as he himself printed an edition of his works, that over and above the forty-one pieces that edition contained, his productions were, perhaps, irregular, or unfinished, or written to serve some local or temporary purpose, or of some other description that rendered them unfit for publication, and, therefore, whatever might have been their number, he thought none of them worthy of selection.

traordinary reputation of DRYDEN was materially injured by his theatrical trammels, the same inconvenience must certainly, in a proportionable degree, have lessened the reputation due to HARDY.

Certainly HARDY must have paved the way for that reputation the French stage so soon afterwards experienced ; for we see, in his life time, not only so great an avidity in the public to frequent the theatre that from three times a week plays were performed every day ; but soon after he got almost an exclusive possession of the drama, on account of the prodigious concourse of spectators, the comedians, for the accommodation of the public, seperated into two companies, one continuing in their old theatre, *Le Hotel de Burgogne*, and the other removing to a new one *au Marais**.

Indeed, the more we consider the circumstance, the more we shall have to admire that HARDY single handed could sustain the prodigious task of furnishing novelty to the theatre with improved success for nearly thirty years, when we shall see that it required not less than twenty celebrated men to keep it up to any pitch of excellence for the following fifty years, during which period the stage flourished under the great CORNEILLE.

* This was about 1600, when, by an ordonnance of the police, the doors of the theatre were obliged to be opened at one o'clock in the day, and the performance to begin at two and finish at four. At that time it was fashionable to dine at noon. There were no lamps in PARIS, few coaches, it stunk with filth, and swarmed with thieves.

On taking leave, therefore, of JODELLE, GARNIER, and HARDY, it may be remarked, that JODELLE merited all the praise he received for emulating BAIF, and, thereby, rescuing the French stage from barbarism by introducing the ancients; for though he must have found insurmountable difficulties in attempting to suit the harmony of the Greek language, and the majesty of the Roman, to tierceness of the French; yet those traits of nature and simplicity to which he was able to give force and effect, were not only admirable in themselves, but served as a model for his successors; which foundation for fame ought not to be denied him; for though it was only sowing a harvest for others to reap, yet it must be allowed that his labours, though not perfect, were highly meritorious, and that had he lived a century later he would certainly have been a celebrated writer.

To GARNIER another species of praise is due, which places his character, as a great genius, even above that of JODELLE; for, though he took his subjects from the ancients, his applications were all at home, certainly the first and most perfect province of tragedy; and which gives a writer opportunity to blend the patriot with the poet. He inspired FRANCE with a just horror of domestic dissensions, by representing the entrails of ROME torne

by her proper citizens. He combatted pride, envy, and cruelty in the Romans, that they might be detested by the French. A pen like this is the club of HERCULES, and does more towards establishing domestic tranquility than a thousand armies. These destroy men, the other destroys monsters.

The praise of a bold and successful attempt at this reformation is due to GARNIER; who, had he been able to have accomplished that extreme difficult task of imitating without becoming a mannerist, would, to the force of his writings, have added taste and style; but the French language had not at that time been sufficiently filtered to be limpid. It required that JODELLE and GARNIER should be perfected by CORNEILLE, and RACINE; who, admirable as they were, experienced advantage in finding the source already explored to their hands.

As to HARDY, we can add no more than that, had he given himself time he must have greatly eclipsed his predecessors; and, taking in the idea, that there was no competitorship, nothing to excite emulation in him; but, on the contrary, that his invention was constantly on the stretch, and that his whole employment was to exhaust his fertile and

productive mind, and all this for no inducement but general applause, for he was always poor, it is impossible to deny that his genius was inexhaustible, his industry meritorious, and his patience exemplary.

CHAP VII.

SCUDERY, TRISTAN, MAIRET, DU RYER, ROTROU,
AND OTHER HARBINGERS OF CORNEILLE.

WE are now come to the time when the dramatic art in FRANCE began to look proudly forward towards perfection; an era which, in any country, cannot be expected but from a grand association of talents. This event nature seems at that time to have considered herself indebted to FRANCE, for the fifty years during which CORNEILLE adorned literature, produced a larger list of eminent dramatic writers than any other country in the same period ever had to boast.

As this great luminary was surrounded with many satellites at his birth, who shone with some brilliancy as they followed him through his career, it will not be improper, in a summary manner, to speak of their merits the better hereafter to illustrate his.

GEORGE SCUDERY, who we have already known

as the panegyrist of HARDY, seems to have been in need of a similar panegyrist himself; for, in endeavouring to out-do his favourite, he fell into much more unpardonable errors himself. He was not contented with writing very fast, and consequently very imperfect, but he thought proper to chuse subjects that were uninteresting, and plots that were inexplicable. His scenes are, therefore, alternately wonderful and tiresome, and his style beautiful and bombastic.

His dramatic pieces, eight in number, were published at various times, as well as a variety of other productions, all which are said to have had a great sale *.

SCUDERY was born of a noble family, in 1601, at HAVRE DE GRACE, and died at PARIS in 1667. He served in the army, obtained a high rank, and was admitted of the French academy.

* This great sale of the works of SCUDERY provoked the following impromptu:

Ah happy SCUDERY, in thought so profuse,
That thy pen every month a new book can produce:
'Tis true thy productions ne'er yet had pretence
To genius, or style, erudition, or sense;
Yet, SCUDERY, be happy; though wise men ne'er heed 'em,
Still booksellers sell 'em that idiots may read 'em.

FRANCIS TRISTAN, furnamed the Hermit, and supposed to have sprung from the famous PIERRE LE HERMITE, author of the first crusade, was born in the Chateau de Souliers, in the provence DE LA MANCHE, in 1601. His character seems to have been something similar to our SAVAGE the poet, for he possessed similar merit, laboured under similar misfortunes, and endured similar poverty.

TRISTAN was placed near the person of the marquis DE VERNEUIL, natural son of HENRY the Fourth; but, having had the misfortune to kill an officer in a rencounter, he fled to ENGLAND, where he first imbibed a taste for letters. After a time he returned, and marshal DE HUMIERES seeing him at BOURDEAUX, presented him to LOUIS the Thirteenth, who granted him a pardon, and GASTON D'ORLEANS took him for one of his gentlemen in ordinary.

Gaming, wenching, and poetry filled the time of poor TRISTAN, but not his pockets. His poverty was extreme. BOILEAU tells us that he passed his summers without a shirt, and his winters without a coat. He died in 1655, after having led a life agitated and full of events, which he himself has given an account of in his romance called *The Disgraced Page*.

TRISTAN wrote a great variety of things, but he is chiefly spoken of for his dramatic productions, of which there are eight known to be his, and two attributed to him. His merit was of a superior stamp to SCUDERY and others. His tragedy of *Mariamne* has certainly considerable merit. Indeed this piece, as well as some others of his writings, furnished matter for the imitation of more celebrated men, and there can be no doubt, had not his life been chequered with so much madness and folly, had he not neglected his friends, trifled with his reputation, and disgraced his situation, for he was noble by birth, and had the distinction of a seat in the French academy, TRISTAN would have made a distinguished figure in literature*.

Of MAIRET there is very little to say. He was born two years before CORNEILLE, and died

* It will be recollected that TRISTAN formed his dramatic taste in ENGLAND. This was some time after the death of SHAKESPEAR, whose works, as well as those of JONSON, BEAUMONT and FLETCHER, and other writers of that time, he must have read. This will incontrovertibly prove that both tragedy and comedy were infinitely forwarder in ENGLAND than in FRANCE, but I shall reserve myself for a better opportunity of speaking to this particularly; when, I think, I shall easily shew that whatever may have been our obligations to the French theatre since CORNEILLE and MOLIERE, it never would have arrived to the state of perfection in which they left it, had not their cold inanimate productions received a promethean glow from the fervid and celestial genius of SHAKESPEAR.

two years after him. He seems as if he had kept his reputation by his connections; for being attached to the admiral MONTMORENCY, he was created a nobleman for his valour. As to any pretensions to rank as a poet he had none but what were very slender indeed. His pieces, which amount to twelve, are in general tragi-comedies, and clothed in very indecent language. They are bold and broad, but have neither conduct, nor regularity. His *Sophonisba*, however, in which he has observed the rule of twenty four hours, excited some curiosity; nay it is even said that VOLTAIRE, on that account, attempted to repair it; but he desisted, saying, that it was like an old house; it might be pulled down and rebuilt with the assistance of better materials, but that it was impossible to repair it.

DU RYER, who was born in PARIS, of a noble family, in 1605, was admitted into the academy in 1656. He was secretary to the duke DE VENDÔME, and obtained late in life the brevet of historiographer of FRANCE with a suitable pension. A disproportionate marriage reduced him to work by the sheet as a poet. This is enough to prove that whatever his merit might have been it had not fair play. He left behind him nineteen dramatic pieces, and five more are attributed to him. *Alcionée*, *Saul*, and *Scevole*, are said to have considerable merit. *L'Abbe*

D'Aubignac, says *Alcionée*, is full of beauty and grandeur; *MENAGE* considers it as a *chef d'œuvre*, and *CHRISTIAN*, queen of SWEDEN, was so enamoured of it, that she had it constantly read to her three times a day*.

DU RYER is generally allowed a considerable share of reputation; which, if it was his due, shackled and trammelled as it was, must have been much greater had he written up to his feelings and not at the command of a task master.

ROTROU was born at *DREUX*, in 1609, three years after *CORNEILLE*; but, as he died thirty years before that great poet, it will be proper that he should be spoken of here. *ROTROU* would have been invited to become a member of the French academy had he been a resident in *PARIS*, which regulation, except to honorary members, was indispensable. As it was he was obliged to decline this distinction, considering it his duty to write at *DREUX*, where he had several honourable employments, to the duties of which he fell a sacrifice; for, conceiving his presence necessary for the better regulation of the inhabitants during a pestilential

This is nothing to the style of *MADAME DACIER*'s partiality for *The Clouds*.

fever, he was himself carried off by the disorder he had been so solicitous to avert.

In nineteen years ROTROU produced thirty-six pieces; in which, as his labours were entirely devoted to the valuable purpose of rendering tragedy natural and interesting, and as there are a great number of poetic beauties to be found in his productions, there can be no doubt but he may be fairly considered as the nearest at that time, in point of intrinsic merit, to CORNEILLE.

ROTRou, nevertheless, wrote too fast. His foible was gaming, and whenever he had a bad chance he repaired it by writing a play. Thus his pieces have not all the same force and beauty. It cannot, however, be denied that in most of them there is an elevation in the designs; the ideas are novel, grand, and bold; and the conduct announces a judicious taste, and a well informed mind.

His errors are the errors of the times, from which even CORNEILLE was not free. His sources, like the sources of other poets, were, as occasion served, Greek, Roman, Italian, Spanish, and English. Tragi-comedies were at that time the prevailing taste, and these were taken from romances, ill constructed, stuffed with trifling characters, frivo-

lous episodes, and every thing unnecessary and extraneous. Combats, meetings, partings, disguises, and other fantastic and extravagant circumstances, outraged common sense and propriety, destroyed sober and rational expectation, and gave the piece more an air of knight errantry than nature.

In this extravagance, perhaps, ROTROU too much indulged himself; but it was only going with the herd, and it does not preclude him from the honest share of praise due to his real merit, which was great and commanding, and which, had he lived to have curbed the mettle of his volatile muse, might have confirmed him a reputation, perhaps, but little inferior to his great cotemporary.

It will be proper to follow ROTROU with some account of DESMARETS, COLLETET, and BOISROBERT, which four, together with CORNEILLE, assisted cardinal RICHELIEU in the fabrication of several miserable performances, in which it is allowed he had a hand, but which were most probably originally written by him and retouched by those five poets, who fathered these plays that the reputation of the cardinal as a great statesman might not be scandalized.

DESMARETS, who was born in 1595, seems to

have had some wit, but much more cunning. He was called *Le Bel-esprit* of visionaries, and the visionary of *Les beaux-esprits*. He managed, however, his visions so well that they realized for him several lucrative situations under cardinal RICHELIEU, through whose solicitation he was also one of the first members of the French academy. He published ten very indifferent dramatic pieces, in many of which the cardinal is supposed to have had a hand, particularly those under the titles of *Europe*, and *Mirame*.

COLLETET, counsellor, and one of the forty members of the French academy, was neither so fortunate, nor so prudent as DESMARETS; for, though he was a great favourite of the cardinal, and condescended to take his share of the odium which attached to him and his colleagues in consequence of the folly of RICHELIEU, who vainly fancied it was as easy to become a poet as a statesman, he had not wherewithal to bury him when he died.

BOISROBERT, who, being one of RICHELIEU's favourites, was given a considerable place, and also introduced among the members of the French academy, seems to have had a fertile genius, and less servility than DESMARETS and COLLETET. He published twenty dramatic pieces, some of which re-

ceived no advantage from the assistance of the cardinal.

There was also a man of very inconsiderable merit, of the name of CHAPELAIN, who seems to have been the servant of all work in his business. He was compiler, amanuensis, prompter, in short any thing; but the most convenient among his accommodating qualities was his fathering all such miserable passages of the cardinal as the rest of the fraternity thought would disgrace them.

RICHELIEU, no doubt had a hand in many of the writings of DESMARETS and BOISROBERT; but the pieces supposed to have been first written by him, and afterwards fitted to the stage by the five poets, as they were then called for distinction, were *Europe*, *Mirame*, and the *Tuilleries*; some particulars relative to which pieces it may not be unenterprising to relate.

After the cardinal had written *Europe*, he sent it by BOISROBERT to the French academy, composed principally of his creatures, and entreated their opinion without flattery; begging also they would honestly correct any thing that militated against the rules of the theatre, or poetry in general. The academy flattered by the unlimited conditions

given them, and, perhaps, pleased at an opportunity of vaunting their own consequence, forgot the deference due to the cardinal's patronage, and disfigured the manuscript with so many alterations that it was all one blot, like the picture of PRAXITELES.

BOISROBERT having with extreme difficulty and caution made his report to his principal, the poor cardinal, who could stand unmoved when any disaster happened to the state, fairly sunk under this disaster that had happened to his play; and, in the first paroxysm of his despair, he tore the copy to pieces, threw it into the chimney, and in a state of the greatest despondency went to bed.

Happily, being summer, there was no fire on the hearth, and thus the wretched cardinal, with the true tenderness of a father for his dear offspring, recollected. He got up, sent for CHEREST, his secretary, ordered him to collect all the scraps that had been thrown into the chimney, and asked him to get some paste, or if there was none in the house, to go to the laundry and fetch some starch. CHEREST instantly obeyed his master's orders, produced the starch, and they passed the greatest part of the night

together starching and patching the play till, at length, it wore a pretty legible form.

Next morning the play was copied in the cardinal's presence, who ordered the corrections made by the academy to be changed, except some few of the most immaterial; and, in this state, he sent it back by BOISROBERT, with directions to inform the academy that they might see he had profited by their advice; but, as it was possible they might not be more infallible than him, he had not altogether abided by their alterations.

This proceeding had the desired effect; for the academy, perhaps at the instance of BOISROBERT, DESMARETS, and the rest, having by this time considered, that, however, scouting the cardinal's play might, as a set of literary characters add to their reputation, yet applauding it would as politicians add more to their interest, they thought proper to return it without any further correction, together with a letter expressing their unanimous approbation.

The cardinal, however, had a more impartial and, certainly, a more just ordeal to pass than the academy. The public, awed by no consideration of interest, damned the piece; and both the car-

dinal and the academy were so ashamed of themselves that, not prevailing upon any of the five to acknowledge a concern in the play, it was attributed by consent to a man of the name of St. SOURLIN, a creature of the cardinal.

As for *Mirame*, the cardinal gave a sensible proof that he was its author, for it cost him a hundred thousand crowns to bring it on the stage. He assisted at the first representation, and was in an agony of despair at finding it did not succeed. When he went home he ordered DESMARETS to attend him. Poor DESMARETS fearing to face his patron alone, took with him a friend, whose name was PETIT, and who had some humour, and more presence of mind.

The moment the cardinal saw them, "Well," said he, "will the French, do you think, ever have any taste? Do you know they were not delighted with *Mirame*." DESMARETS was confounded, but PETIT knowing better how to humour the cardinal, "It was not I assure you monseigneur," said he, "the fault of the play, which is admirable, " It was the fault of the actors. Your eminence " must have perceived that they were not only " imperfect in their parts, but they were all drunk." " I thought so," said the cardinal; " well, we

“ shall see what is to be done on the next representation.”

DESMARETS and PETIT, were so satisfied by this hint, that they packed an audience, who were not only admitted gratis*, but paid for going; and we

* This, probably, was the origin of orders; a practice by no means improper under certain regulations and restrictions; but which, carried to such a shameful height as to form a positive opposition to the public opinion, ought to be publicly scouted. It was formerly the privilege of actors, according to their respective situations, to give their friends a gratuitous opportunity of seeing them perform; who, in return, promoted their interest at their benefits. It was also held politic, both for the particular interest of the theatre, and the general interest of the public, that men of genius should be permitted gratis to witness dramatic productions, because the advice of enlightened men must necessarily assist the operations of the stage. There are some few more cases also, in which orders are not an insult but a compliment to the public. But when it reaches to the scandalous length of procuring a suborned auditory, who, right or wrong, are told to support a piece, whatever may be the express sense of the public, I know of nothing so shameful and so revolting. Every man who hazards a trial of his abilities before an English audience is as safe as on a trial for life before an English jury; nay, it is justice multiplied; for, should he succeed, instead of twelve jurors he has hundreds, indeed now thousands, who sincerely rejoice at his acquittal; and, on the contrary, should they, from truth, from candour, and from the deference due to their own discernment, be unwillingly obliged to pronounce a harsh sentence; still, be it author, or actor, has the object, whose merits they have met to investigate, an obligation to their decision, which may either beget emulation, that emulation may produce perfection, or else induce a relinquishment of that pursuit for which there was no qualification. But this is not all.

are told by PÉLISSON that the cardinal enjoyed this hired applause with the most enthusiastic rapture, sometimes shewing himself to the audience, that they might be induced to applaud, sometimes loudly applauding himself, and sometimes commanding silence, that his favourite passages in the play might be the better attended to. Poor BOIS-ROBERT, however, with all his zeal, suffered se-

Putting it out of the question that the public ought to be offended at the insolence of these gratuitous critics, who cry bravo in concert, and applaud at the word of command; there is not common sense in the mode by which these manœuvres are conducted. Those who visit a theatre through the medium of orders, exclusive of such as I excepted before, are a set the most vulgar, the most ignorant, and, indeed, the most impudent that can be imagined. Can a manager have an idea that they embellish his theatre? They sit in the boxes it is true, but their appearance would disgrace the upper gallery. Can he rely upon them to criticise a dramatic performance? They do not understand it. Does he think that they are the proper persons to rely on in case of a riot? The very reverse, they exist but in a row. What an evil then must it become when it is considered, for so is the fact, that, with all this meanness, this ignorance, and this vulgarity, these orderly people in every possible way inconvenience all the rest of the audience. They get the best places, they are the loudest critics, and they feel themselves so perfectly at home, that they consider the play and its representation as an entertainment entirely provided for their accommodation. It were pity but managers and authors, for actors are now so abridged of this privilege that they are out of the question, had sufficient manliness and independence to break through this disgraceful custom. It would at once speak a consciousness of their own merits, and an honest determination to court a decision from the real voice of the public; the only one that can reflect any lustre on their reputation.

verely upon this occasion; for, not being able in so much hurry and bustle to discriminate as to the characters of those volunteers for whom he, together with his colleagues, had beat up under the banner of the cardinal, he unfortunately introduced some ladies of equivocal character into the box where sat the duchess of AIGUILLON, who was so outraged and offended at this conduct, that RICHELIEU most ungratefully banished him at her request. The academy, however, who knew, to their shame, how little reason the cardinal had really to be displeased with BOISROBERT, sent a deputation to demand his recall; which, however, was not effected till RICHELIEU, being ill, principally from chagrin, asked his physician for a recipe, who answered that his best recipe would be the presence of BOISROBERT.

The comedy of *The Tuilleries* was performed in the cardinal's palace, who arranged all the scenes himself. CORNEILLE, who, perhaps, felt himself a little awkward upon this occasion, wanted to alter something in the third act; but RICHELIEU told him *qu'il falloit avoir un esprit de suite*, meaning that the genius for him must be one subservient and accommodating.

The prologue of this comedy, which was written by the cardinal, but fathered by CHAPELAIN,

praised all the authors, who were seated upon this occasion very conspicuously among the audience. COLLETET, after the manuscript of the comedy was finished, read it to the cardinal; who, having heard four lines, was so enchanted that he immediately laid him down fifty pistoles, bidding him stop there, for that the king's revenue could not furnish enough to pay for the rest in proportion. The following are the lines which so enchanted the cardinal:

En meme temps j'ai vu, sur le bord d'un ruisseau,
La canne s'humecter de la bourbe de l'eau ;
D'une voix enrouée, et d'un battement d'aile,
Animer le canard qui languit auprès d'elle *.

RICHELIEU, when he became more acquainted with these lines, thought he could improve them,

* This is exactly BAYES's boar and sow, and if these five poets had made it their study to hold the cardinal up as an object of ridicule they could not have more effectually succeeded. That every reader may have an opportunity to judge of this great statesman's taste, I have endeavoured to render these four lines into English in such a way as to do justice to all the parties.

So have I seen, inclining to be fond,
The humid duck explore the muddy pond ;
Ply her thick voice, her wings in dalliance shake,
To animate to love the amorous drake.

COLLETET laughed in his sleeve at this generosity of the cardinal, and, being asked by a friend if it was true, answered,

“ What a sum for four lines, full of quibbles and quirks,
“ Ah would at this rate I could sell all my works ! ”

and sent for COLLETET to talk to him upon the subject. COLLETET wished to know what alteration he thought proper to make, and the cardinal said the second line, *La canne s'humecter de la bourbe de l'eau*, ought to run *La canne barboter dans la bourbe de l'eau*; barboter, which means to muddle, being a better phrase than humecter, which means to moisten. COLLETET affected to think the matter worthy mature consideration, and promised to write to the cardinal upon the subject. This promise he performed, submitting to his patron whether the word muddle was not too low and unworthy an application for the chaste passion of a duck and a drake*.

The cardinal, who was extremely angry with this letter, had scarcely read it, when he was waited on by several courtiers, who came to announce to him a brilliant victory, the measures of which had been taken by his advice and the whole conducted under his direction. They addressed him in a style full of flattery, saying nothing could resist the authority of his eminence. "You are mistaken," said the cardinal, "that scoundrel COLLETET resists me.

* SCRUB's observation of two intriguing ducks in a mill-pond, seems to have originated from the cardinal's favourite passage. How unconscious FARQUHAR was that he made SCRUB ridicule the great RICHELIEU.

“ I did him the honour to alter a line in his verses,
“ and he has the impudence to write me a long
“ letter, in which he endeavours to prove I am in
“ the wrong.”

It can be easily understood how such men as DESMARETS, COLLETET, and BOISROBERT, came to be RICHELIEU's poetic drudges; but it is extraordinary that CORNEILLE, or even ROTROU, should notoriously join such a confederacy. It appears, however, that they consented to it with extreme reluctance, for they were by no means active in the business, and withdrew themselves as soon as they could. Nay, it should seem that RICHELIEU felt this poignantly, for he did every thing in his power to injure CORNEILLE; and, indeed, meditated a revenge which he thought would accomplish his ruin.

It, however, disgraced the cardinal most signally, which the reader will easily allow when it is known that this meditated revenge was no less than venturing a second representation of *Europe*, which had been damned, in opposition to CORNEILLE's popular tragedy of *The Cid*. *Europe* was thus performed under the influence of the cardinal; but when the actor came to give it out again he

was hissed off, and nothing further was suffered till the performers promised the *Cid* for the next night's representation.

RICHELIEU is excused by his biographer for all this absurdity under an idea that he patronized these poets, but the reverse happens to be the fact; for, according to what we have read, they patronized him. Instead of allowing to them the influence of his name, and protecting every valuable line they wrote, he made them his tools that he might vaunt under their sanction every miserable line written by him. Is this patronage? No. Give me that spontaneous disinterested patronage that, without any selfish views or pretensions, distinguishes merit, fosters it, brings it to light, sanctions it, recommends it; and, thereby, confers an honourable pleasure on the patron, and proves a mutual advantage to the poet and the public.

But, putting every other consideration out of the question, there cannot be any thing so silly as the idea of several men writing in conjunction*.

* Among many instances that may be cited to prove this, POPE, GAY, and ARBUTHNOT, who separately, one would think, might have written a tolerable good play, laid their heads together and produced a most wretched farce that was deservedly damned.

Here the application is particularly in point ; for though every one of these men, except the cardinal, produced, single handed, plays which had success ; yet, when they worked together, nothing could be more contemptible than the issue of their labours.

M M 2

CHAP VIII.

 DRAMATIC EVENTS FROM THE BIRTH OF CORNEILLE TO THE DEATH OF CARDINAL RICHELIEU.

THE great CORNEILLE, an appellation that admirable writer very honourably merited, was born at ROUEN, the twenty-sixth day of June, 1606. He brought out his comedy of *Melite* in 1625, at the age of nineteen, and he died the first of October, in 1684.

He was intended for the bar, but his genius was too elevated for that profession; at the same time it was difficult to divine what bent his mind would take, as he manifested no extraordinary gifts of nature. The spark, however, only lay dormant. It remained to be roused into action by love. A young man took his friend with him to visit his mistress; the lady chose the friend and rejected the lover; the friend, charmed with this preference, became a poet upon the spot. Hence the comedy of *Melite*, and hence the emancipation of the great CORNEILLE.

There was treachery in the case certainly; but the lady, who was the subject of the comedy, and who went a long time in ROUEN by the name of MELITE, was principally to blame; yet, whatever anger the lover of this lady might harbour against his mistress, the public were willing to acknowledge the highest obligations to her, for they seemed from that moment to have a taste for dramatic entertainments unknown to them before.

The particulars of this great man's life, which for such a man are rather confined, will gradually come in with the accounts of his dramatic success; which, for a time, I shall now uninterruptedly follow. His second piece was a tragi-comedy called *Clitandre*, which he wrote to correct the too great simplicity that, with all its merit, the public complained of in *Melite*. This effort, however, had better have been let alone; for, if *Melite* was too simple, *Clitandre* was too extravagant; and ROTROU having two years before brought out his first comedy, *The Bague de L'oubli*, with success, and soon after his comedy of *The Hypochondriaque*, the public had paused upon the merit of CORNEILLE, which doubt *Clitandre* unfortunately did not serve to clear up.

His third piece called *La Veuve*, which was a

comedy, did not make its appearance till 1634, and in the interval between *Clitandre* and that, ROTROU had brought out *Doristée et Cléagénor*, *l'Hereuse Constance*, *Les Occasions Perdues*, *Les Ménechmes*, which served afterwards as a subject for REGNARD, and *Celemene*, which was again retouched by TRISTAN, and at length written anew and brought out by ROTROU, with prodigious success, under the title of *Venceflas* in 1647*.

Thus ROTROU had by this time made a formidable stand against CORNEILLE, which circumstance neither *La Veuve* nor, *La Galerie du Palais*, a comedy performed the same year, had power materially to affect; nor even another comedy called *La Suivante*, the principal merit of which is, if we

* When *Venceflas* was in rehearsal, ROTROU was put into prison for a gaming debt; he, therefore, sold his piece to the players for twenty pistoles, which was just sufficient to release him, but its success was so extraordinary that they gratuitously presented him with a considerable sum, all which proves that, as this was in the zenith of CORNEILLE's reputation, ROTROU must have been highly in favour with the public. This piece which like the *Cid* was originally Spanish, was afterwards popular from a remarkable circumstance. The famous BARON quitted the theatre for thirty years, and he finished his second career as he had done his first by performing in this play. He was then seventy years old, and had such an asthma that he could scarcely speak. He was, however, entreated to perform, but had scarcely uttered twenty lines when he was obliged to quit the stage, which he did with these remarkable words:

Si proche du cercueil ou je me vois descendre.

believe a French author, that the five acts are so exactly of a length that there is not a single line in any one more than any other.

It is very possible that this extraordinary effort of bringing out three pieces in one year, evidently excited by the success of his rival, and, after all, meeting with but indifferent success himself, induced CORNEILLE to join the cardinal's confederacy, for it was on the following year that *The Tuilleries* was performed, in which our author notoriously assisted as one of the five. We must, however, do him the justice to believe that he very soon grew sick of the connection, for *Europe* did not appear till 1637*, and, for *Mirame*, it was not performed till 1639; and as we know that the cardinal and CORNEILLE were at enmity when the *Cid* was produced, which was in 1636, it is almost reduced to a certainty that this coalition, as far as our poet was concerned in it, did not last much more than a year, and that he would never have joined it at all but under the expectation of meeting with a liberal pa-

* I found it extremely difficult to get any authority that I might rely on in relation to the first appearance of this play. The accounts generally say that it came out in 1643, but this cannot be, for the cardinal died in 1642. It is most probable that it was produced as soon as possible after the *Cid*, and, therefore, I have placed it in 1637, which some accounts seem to confirm.

tron, in which expectation he was completely disappointed.

In 1635 appeared, written by CORNEILLE, a comedy called *La Place Royale*, and his first tragedy called *Medée*, neither of which had by any means capital success; and early in 1636, came out a comedy called *L'Illusion*, which CORNEILLE himself confesses he wrote by way of diverting his mind from the gloom of having written *Medée*, and, therefore, he declares it deserves but little notice. In the interim ROTROU, always at work, had surprized the public with *L'Heureuse Naufrage*, and four or five other pieces, so that their success was hitherto upon the whole pretty nearly equal, but it was very soon decreed that the genius of CORNEILLE should gain so complete a triumph as to leave all his competitors at an immense distance, for in two months after the appearance of *L'Illusion* came out that admirable performance *The Cid*.

This piece, which has many striking beauties, and many glaring faults, is nevertheless, upon the whole, a most extraordinary effort. *The Cid* was celebrated before CORNEILLE brought it out. He himself acknowledges that he is much indebted upon this occasion to GUILLIN DE CASTRO, a Spanish poet, and FONTENELLE says that there was

no nation, however barbarous, where the *Cid* was unknown. It must be confessed, however, the *Cid* itself must have been as barbarous as those people who cherished it, till it came polished from the hands of CORNEILLE, who alone was intended as the lapidary to shew the lustre of this diamond.

Never had a tragedy more celebrated success. It was repeated by heart, taught to children, and it was the custom to say *beau comme le Cid*. Cardinal RICHELIEU, we are told, had an ambition to be known as the author of it; but CORNEILLE, fonder of fame than fortune, rejected the proposal with contempt. That all powerful minister in other things, defeated in this, insisted that the academy should examine it, who presently, in their officious zeal to oblige their principal, found out that all the rules of the drama were violated. CORNEILLE's partizans agreed to this, but drew from these premises a most powerful conclusion in its favour.

All the poets, however, influenced by either the bribes or menaces of the cardinal, joined in this hue and cry against the *Cid*, with the single exception of ROTROU, who with a generous disdain refused to join the league. ROTROU called CORNEILLE his father, his instructor, and never ceased to manifest

the highest veneration for his character, which gives no little lustre to his own when we consider how long he had been his powerful rival, and how nobly generous it was to place himself the palm upon the head of his competitor.

It is hardly possible, and if it were possible it is almost ridiculous, to enumerate the nest of envious hornets which were roused by the extraordinary merit and success of this piece. The academy, through the influence of the cardinal, sat as gravely and as solemnly to examine its merits as if the welfare of the nation had depended upon the issue of their deliberation; but, as if they feared the ill consequence of this officiousness, they affected to proceed with all possible caution and delicacy.

It is thought that the cardinal's aversion to this piece proceeded from some sentiments it contained which exposed the undue influence of ministers, and reprobated their injustice and rapacity; it was impossible, therefore, for him to act too warily. He first procured SCUDERY to abuse the work, and then represented, through BOISROBERT, to CORNEILLE that it would be a high advantage to permit his piece to pass through an examination by the academy, by way of silencing every clamour; to which CORNEILLE, seeing the drift of the application, an-

swered, that if the judgment of the academy would give the cardinal the smallest amusement he certainly should not oppose it.

This was construed into a full consent on the part of CORNEILLE. Commissioners were immediately appointed to examine the *Cid*, and, that every thing might wear an appearance of impartiality, SCUDERY'S remarks were also to be examined. After this the observations of the commissioners were reported and deliberated on in full assembly. It was a long time, however, though they had several debates before they came to a conclusion, but at length they agreed on reducing the *Cid* to that form in which they thought it ought to have been represented. It was in this state given to a printer, and the first sheet was sent to the cardinal for his opinion, who found they had gone from one extreme to the other; for, instead of pointing out the faults and amending them, they had taken out the beauties and rendered the faults still more glaring than ever.

RICHELIEU, finding he should only expose himself, sent to stop the impression, because what but blind malice could prompt a step at which the indignant public must naturally revolt. Being, therefore, a better politician than those he employed, he contented himself with a few inconsi-

derable alterations, which CORNEILLE had too much good sense to oppose, and thus the matter was compounded, and the piece has remained in that state to this hour.

This play, however, though one of the most celebrated that has even to this moment appeared upon the French stage, underwent a thousand comments. The academy set the example, and it became the mode to censure the *Cid*. SHAKESPEAR himself, and that is a bold word, never was more roughly handled. Some lines were said to be immoral, others puerile, others bombastic, and others ridiculous. Even RACINE when he came forward as a poet, did not fail to turn the *Cid* into ridicule. He parodied in his piece called *Les Plaideurs*, the following line spoken in the *Cid* by DON DIEGO.

Ses rides, sur son front, ont grave ses exploits:

RACINE's line runs thus :

Ses rides, sur son front, gravoient tous ses exploits.

“ How is this,” said CORNEILLE, “ is it permitted to a young man to ridicule people's best verses ?” But in this RACINE only took up the idea of the academy, whose remark was, that wrinkles do not mark exploits, they only mark years.

Poor BARON, as I have already noticed, like

ÆSOP, quitted the stage and appeared on it thirty years afterwards. He was then very infirm, but had been so great a favourite that the public suffered any thing from him. One evening, however, when he repeated the following lines, they burst into an involuntary laugh.

*Je suis jeune, il est vrai : mais aux âmes bien nées,
La valeur n'attend pas le nombre des années.*

BARON disregarded the risible effect this had upon the audience, and gravely repeated the passage, when they laughed louder than before; upon which he came forward and seriously addressed the parterre. "Gentlemen," said he, "I shall now begin for the third time; but if I hear any one laugh, I shall quit the theatre immediately, never to return." This had its effect, and they took particular care to offend him no more, although the same evening when kneeling at the feet of his mistress, she bid him rise, he was obliged to entreat the assistance of two scene shifters before he could get on his legs.

But the famous expression, "A tu du cœur," has been more cavilled at than any thing in the piece. It has, which is saying a great deal, been twisted and turned as many ways as SHAKESPEAR'S "put out the light*." This expression has been

* A wag had an idea, at the time this line begat so much con-

contended was altered by the academy from "a tu un cœur;" and to confirm this, some of the editions have it so; and I myself heard it used to LE KAIN. The arguments in favour of this last reading are shrewd and sensible. A tu du cœur is simply, "Hast thou courage?" Which is a tame question indeed to be put to the valorous RODRIGUE, from his father too. A tu un cœur is, "Hast thou a heart?" Which may be construed, Hast thou nature, affection, family pride, hast thou, in short, resolution, dear as the daughter is to thee, to avenge the wrongs of thy father by destroying her's? Is thy affection to thy father proof against thy love for her to this degree? And his answer beginning "Tout autre que mon pere," is heightened by giving it this turn.

But vainly were the tongues and pens of so many writers and critics at work to decry the merit

tention, of insisting that SHAKESPEAR's meaning was as follows: "When I have put out the light, perhaps, as it has been my custom at that time to indulge those fond ideas that fill the warm imaginations of husbands, who are going to bed to their wives, I may forget my repentment in her embraces, and thus her life may be spared." An idea full of ingenuity as well as poetical justice; for, had DESDEMONA lived only an hour, every thing would have been discovered, the guilty would have been punished, and virtue would have been triumphant.

of this piece. It triumphed over all its enemies. This DESPREAUX notices in the following lines :

En vain contre le *Cid* un ministre se ligue ;
 Tout l'ARIS pour CHIMENE, a les yeux DE RODRIGUE.
 L'Academie en corps a beau le censurer :
 Le public revolte s'obstine a l'admirer.

The only hope that now remained with the cardinal of crushing CORNEILLE was that his following productions might be so inferior to the *Cid* as to lower his reputation ; but he was completely baffled in these very charitable expectations ; for *Horace*, which was his next performance, confirmed that fame the *Cid* had acquired ; and, in spite of the intrigues of the academy, who again sat in judgment on him, the public laughed their puny attempts to scorn ; and, in proportion as their favourite was calumniated, they strove to render him the justice his merit deserved*.

Horace appeared early in 1639, and a few months afterwards CORNEILLE brought out *Cinna*, a tragedy of considerable celebrity ; some say it is his best work, others have declared for *Polieucte*, and he himself preferred *Rodogune*.

* CORNEILLE said upon this occasion that it was but fair his piece should meet the same fate of him who was the subject of it ; for, added he, " HORATIUS was condemned by the Duumvirs, but " absolved by the people."

Cinna wrought an effect on LOUIS the Fourteenth, very honourable for its author, and to the dramatic art. The Chevalier de ROHAN had conspired against the state, and the king had constantly refused to grant his pardon to the most powerful and pressing solicitations. The night before the execution of the chevalier, LOUIS was at the representation of *Cinna*; many passages of which piece struck him so forcibly, particularly the speech of AUGUSTUS in the fifth act, where he congratulates himself on having obtained a conquest over his passions, that though, from pride, or some political considerations, he did not revoke the sentence of ROHAN, yet he frequently afterwards declared that if, at that moment, he had been solicited to save his life under any colourable pretext, he certainly should have consented.

This tragedy drew tears from the eyes of the great CONDE at the age of twenty, of which LOUIS augured so well that he considered it as a presage of his future greatness.

Polieucte, which was the next production of CORNEILLE, came out in 1640. This piece had very nearly been consigned to oblivion, or rather smothered in its birth. CORNEILLE sent it to the theatre for the approbation of the actors, who re-

fused to perform it. One of the performers, who was entrusted to return it to the author, one day reperused a part of it as he walked about in his lodgings, but being displeased with a passage he met in it, he threw it carelessly from him, and the copy fell upon the tester of the bed. He gave himself no further trouble about it, and nobody knew for a considerable while, what was become of the play. After it had been mislaid eighteen months an upholsterer took down the bed, and rescued *Polieucte* from oblivion.

Previous to the representation of *Polieucte* on the stage, CORNEILLE read that piece at the Hotel de Rambouillet, which was then the sovereign tribunal in all literary matters. The piece was applauded in the presence of CORNEILLE, out of that respect which they thought due to the merit of so great a man, but VOITURE was privately enjoined to inform CORNEILLE, which he did in the most delicate manner, that *Polieucte* had not found that warm encouragement that might have been expected, and that in particular those passages which concerned religion had most displeased. CORNEILLE, alarmed at this, would have withdrawn his piece, but was at length persuaded to leave it in the hands of the actors, which, however, he would

not do till one of them promised that it should not be performed. This promise was broke, which, probably, gave no displeasure to the author, and *Polieucte* made its public appearance.

In the fourth act of *Polieucte*, there is a scene where SEVERUS, struck with the unity of GOD, discovers to FABIAN his doubts concerning the Pagan religion, which admits of many deities at once. BELLEROSE, who performed SEVERUS, in conveying these sentiments, adopted a tone of such moderation and good sense, that the public, who had before seen nothing but extravagance and bombast, were greatly struck with this new manner, so much more like nature; and, as the subject was very awful on which BELLEROSE exerted himself, it was not only prodigiously admired, but begat a respect and consideration for actors which had not before been attached to their characters.

What SEVERUS says is no more than the vague doubt of a Pagan, to whom the extravagance of his religion rendered it an object of suspicion, but who had not the smallest knowledge of those proofs which render the christian religion more respectable than paganism. On this account CORNEILLE was very much blamed for printing it, for it was said

that notwithstanding his delicate and proper intentions, they might be misinterpreted.

Polieucte, however, as I have already said, began to open the eyes of the public as to the respectability of dramatic entertainments, considered in a moral light.—This circumstance, joined to another altogether as extraordinary, no less than that the actors, from the moment they were considered as more respectable, actually became so, procured, on the sixteenth of April, 1641, the following favourable arret,

“ In case the said comedians regulate the action
 “ of their performances, so as to be entirely ex-
 “ empt from impurity, we will that their exhibitions
 “ —as by this means they will innocently amuse
 “ the public—be considered as void of blame and
 “ reproach, and also that their occupation shall not
 “ be pleaded as an impediment to the exercise of
 “ any business, or connection in public commerce.”

In 1641, CORNEILLE produced *Pompée*, and in 1642, in which year cardinal RICHELIEU died, appeared *Le Menteur*, certainly CORNEILLE's best comedy, so that the cardinal lived long enough to see the man against whom he had shewn so much rancour, merely because he was possessed of su-

perior talents to himself, which talents he disdained to prostitute for patronage, secure in a firm and permanent reputation, which all his insidious arts had not been able to deprive him of.

As to other dramatic events from the birth of CORNEILLE to the death of RICHELIEU, they consist principally of contentions for fame between different poets, among whom there were a great variety of pretenders, indeed so many that the regular theatres could not entertain their productions; in consequence of this, several attempts were made to establish a third theatre, one of which in 1632 partially succeeded.

A party of these disappointed poets, through various interests, prevailed on the lieutenant civil to grant them permission to open a theatre at the Tennis-court in the street *Michel-de-comte* for two years. This theatre being situated in a part of PARIS where the streets were very narrow, and the surrounding inhabitants of the lowest order it became a nest for all manner of thieves and sharpers, and also a market for the vent of the most execrable literary trash. It was, therefore, represented to the parliament as a nuisance, and in less than a twelve-month from its establishment it was shut up by authority.

Of the confederacy who wrote in the pay of RICHELIEU, we have partly seen the success; it may not, however, be improper to go over such particulars as may serve to shew the complexion of the times as to the encouragement of the drama during that period.

SCUDERY between the birth of CORNEILLE and 1642, brought out fifteen pieces with various success. His first performance was a tragi-comedy called *Ligdamon et Lidias*, for which he thus apologizes: "I have passed," says he, "more years among armies than hours in my closet, and have used more matches to fire guns than to light lamps. I can range foldiers better than words, and know more adroitly to halt a battalion than to round a period." Of these truths this piece gives abundant proof, for it is certainly a most miserable performance, and should not have been mentioned here but for the opportunity of noticing what dwarfish seconds RICHELIEU had recourse to when he combatted the giant CORNEILLE.

When SCUDERY produced his *L'Amour Tyranique*, a very indifferent performance, the cardinal fought knee deep for it. He declared that this piece spoke its own eulogium; and SARRAZIN, to curry favour, printed a discourse at the head of it

addressed to the French academy, where he endeavoured to point out the beauties of the play, and the talents of the author. In consequence of this all PARIS crowded to it, and at their return home laughed at themselves for their credulous folly. Upon the whole his *Mort de César* seems to have been his best play, and VOLTAIRE was so much of that opinion that he certainly borrowed many passages from it.

The pieces of DU RYER, during this period, eight in number, are of a better kind than those of SCUDERY; but they give proof in how very barbarous a state the stage still continued. We have seen FONTENELLE incensed against HARDY for the profligacy of his muse and the indecent situations into which he has thrown his characters, but the *Lucrece* of DU RYER will shew that even the commanding genius of CORNEILLE had not been able to give the theatre that polish without which it cannot be considered in a state of perfection.

The plot of this piece is simply the Roman story. TARQUIN, with a poignard in his hand, demands of LUCRETIA the sacrifice of her virtue. She struggles and escapes behind the scenes, the audience presently hear her cries, and soon after

she comes on in the utmost disorder and fairly tells the spectators that her honour is violated*.

TO MAIRET certainly very little praise can be due, if we are to credit, which is generally admitted, that *Sophonisba*, which as we have seen VOLTAIRE thought it worth his while to retouch, was written by THEOPHILUS VIAUT, and the *Viofinaries* by DESMARETS,* with the assistance of RICHELIEU; but this last may be a mistake, owing to the similarity of the names.

There is something in the story of VIAUT, that it may be worth while to relate. His manners were

* This circumstance is topped by the elegant TERENCE in his comedy of *The Andria*, who makes a lady complain on the stage of a pain in her bowels, and after she has retired for some time, during which she is heard to groan and cry piteously, the audience are informed that she is brought to bed. Indeed TERENCE is so fond of ladies with child that he has introduced another of them in his *Adelphi*, and also a common prostitute, both of whom are honestly married to these brothers with the consent of their father and of their uncle who had adopted one of them; and really if these are the pieces of MENANDER, stolen from the Greek by TERENCE, for the edification of the Romans, and we are to consider these productions as models for us, the true drift and intention of the dramatic art is to reward vice and punish virtue; but these are the ancients, and who shall have the temerity for a single moment to doubt their infallibility.

so licentious that he was banished FRANCE. He had, nevertheless, some friends; and after he had resided a few years in ENGLAND, where he imbibed an inclination for the dramatic art, he was recalled. He was always of the persuasion of the country where he happened to live. In GERMANY he was a Calvinist, in England a Protestant, and in FRANCE a Roman Catholic. He was, nevertheless, in every place a libertine; and as he wrote poetry with great facility, he never failed to lash the roguery of priests with great asperity. On his return to FRANCE he wrote a severe poem called *Parnasse Satyrique*, which work was considered so very licentious that he was condemned to be burnt. He escaped and was burnt in effigy. As he was wandering, however, from one retreat to another, he was arrested at CATELET, and shut up in the same dungeon with RAVAILLAC. The parliament commenced anew their process against him, and he had such address that his trial was alternately put off and renewed until the expiration of two years; when, through the great interest made for him, his sentence was meliorated to perpetual banishment.

He retired to the estate of the duke of MÓ-MORENCY, where he lived in a more reasonable manner, and declared to his last hour that he was

innocent of the charge that had been brought against him.

He was intimate with MAIRET, who was also protected by MOMORENCY; and if DESBARREAUX is to be credited, who was the friend and intimate of them both, THEOPHILE left behind him in the possession of MAIRET his tragedy of *Sophonisba*; which, with the deduction of the *Visionnaires*, sinks MAIRET's fame materially.

Of the productions of ROTROU I have spoken more at large, that poet's reputation having been the nearest to that of CORNEILLE. In 1642, he had brought out twenty-six of his plays, many of which had considerable merit, and nothing can give stronger proof of this fact than that, though he is at present very little known on the stage by his own proper writings, yet the materials that composed them are so good, the characters so natural, and the subjects so dramatic, that the most celebrated writers since his time have not disdained to take him for their model; witness *The Thébaïde* of RACINE, which is an imitation of his *Antigone*, *The Inès* of DE LA MOTTE, taken from his *Laure Persecutée*, and *Les Sœurs Rivaies* of QUINAULT, which is but little more than a copy of his *Deux Pucelles*.

It would be prolix and tiresome to notice any thing further concerning the theatre during the time it was patronized, if I may so call it, by RICHELIEU. A man, as SHAKESPEAR says, speaking of his brother cardinal, of an unbounded stomach; who, not content with governing FRANCE almost absolutely, with lowering the pride of AUSTRIA, and regulating the movements of EUROPE at his own will, added, to all this desire of stirring up national commotions, a perpetual wish of fomenting commotions in the theatre. When the *Cid* came out, he was as much alarmed as if the Spaniards had been at the gates of PARIS. What then must have been his miserable condition, if FONTENELLE is to be believed, who says, "that after the *Cid*, CORNEILLE became more elevated in *Horace*, " still more in *Cinna*, and still more in *Polieucte*; " beyond which no merit can reach."

It cannot be denied that this struggle of RICHELIEU to attain dramatic fame certainly ascertained what dramatic fame was. The cardinal's favour being naturally sought after, all those who fancied they had literary talents put what little merit they had to the test; all those who really had genius, strained every nerve to excel one another. This emulation in a short time did wonders. It purified

the taste; mended the style; and regulated the conduct of dramatic entertainments.

The choruses, which had been introduced by JODELLE, and scrupulously observed by the dramatic poets till 1629, were afterwards banished from the theatre. Instrumental performers were substituted in their place, who were first situated between the wings on the stage, afterwards in the upper boxes, after that in the lower boxes, till, at length, it was thought proper to situate them between the audience and the stage, where they are now constantly seated.

For these and other circumstances, which contributed to perfect the theatre, and which could not in so short a space as twelve years have wrought such a reform without the assistance of some high and commanding influence, the French nation are certainly indebted to RICHELIEU; who, though he in himself found a wide difference in the talents necessary to form a great writer and a great statesman, was certainly the cause of bringing forward to public notice that merit in others which he envied but could not imitate.

All this FONTENELLE, though his best apologist, allows; but he adds, that “he recompensed as a

“ minister that merit of which he was jealous as a
“ poet ; and that, however, his great mind might
“ have had weakneses, he seldom failed to repair
“ his faults by something noble.” Surely when
Fontenelle made this remark he forgot that he
was writing the life of Corneille.

CHAP. IX.

FROM THE DEATH OF RICHELIEU TO THE
DEATH OF ROTROU.

THOUGH the great reputation of CORNEILLE, at the death of RICHELIEU, could not have received much additional celebrity, for nothing is so fair an object of public encouragement as that which is privately oppressed, yet after that period, by being more unrestrained, it grew more commanding. His pieces, in the opinion of the public, threw all others at a distance, and those four tragedies which FONTENELLE declared nothing could exceed, continually occupied the theatre, adding at each performance a new trophy to his well earned fame.

The success of the *Menteur* induced CORNEILLE to follow it up with a sequel, which like the original was an imitation of *Lopes de Vega*. This sequel seems to have shewn its author that, however he might be capable of writing comedy, it was either not his forte so properly as tragedy, or that comedy was not in FRANCE arrived at that perfection to which

he and others had brought tragedy. Indeed this task remained to be performed by MOLIERE.

The Suite du Menteur, though it received applause, not, however the applause to which CORNEILLE had been accustomed, and though, when it was better understood upon a revival, it had still greater success, determined CORNEILLE to return to tragedy. He paused, however, probably that he might do nothing unworthy the fame he had so honourably acquired, and did not venture to produce another play until 1646, when the public testified the highest satisfaction at his tragedy of *Rodogune*.

I have noticed already that CORNEILLE rather inclined to think this his best work. Let us see what he says himself on the subject. "I have
" been often asked," says he, "which of all my
" dramatic poems I esteem the most, and I have
" generally found that those who have put the
" question to me were prejudiced either in favour
" of *Cinna*, or *The Cid*. I have, therefore, been
" cautious of declaring my real sentiments, which
" are certainly in favour of *Rodogune*. This pre-
" ference is, perhaps, in me the effect of that blind
" partiality which parents sometimes entertain for
" one child rather than another; perhaps it may
" be tainted with a little self love because this

“tragedy is more properly my own than any thing
“that has preceded it, on account of the incidents
“being new, original, invented, and such as had
“never before been placed on a theatre; and, if
“this reason should be just, it establishes a fact
“which confirms the propriety of my partiality.”
I shall have good opportunity to prove that CORNEILLE was not singular in this opinion.

This preference for *Rodogune* seemed a presentiment to CORNEILLE that his reputation was at its height; for, from the time that tragedy was produced till 1653, when CORNEILLE left the theatre in disgust the particulars of which we shall see hereafter, though his general fame kept an honourable stand, his productions were reviewed with less warmth than he had been accustomed to experience. His tragedy of *Theodore*, produced the latter end of 1646, had very indifferent success, considering it was the production of the great CORNEILLE. *Heracles*, brought out in 1647, though admired by the judicious, the world affected not to understand, and *Andromede* was obliged for the astonishing reception it met with to scenery, machinery, and a living Pegasus, the best performer, according to public opinion, in the whole piece.

The fact is that CORNEILLE was born to be the

sport of cardinals. RICHELIEU endeavoured to overwhelm him by turning the tide of prejudice one way, and MAZARINE endeavoured to leave him aground, and the theatre with him, by diverting it another*.

I have noticed that *Theodore* was coolly received. *Heraclius* was of itself a singular production; but by the inattention of the public, who began to be tired of every thing regular and striking, it was considered as a very heteroclite performance, and incapable of affording pleasure equal to the pains it took to pay it proper attention.

The fact is, CORNEILLE had been so charmed with that originality on which he so warmly congratulates himself in *Rodogune*, that he was determined to be still more original in *Heraclius*. In consequence of this he has certainly in places obscured what he meant to elucidate. The Abbé PELEGRIN whim-

* CORNEILLE when he brought out *Cinna*, probably under an idea that it would gall RICHELIEU, had determined to dedicate it to MAZARINE; but receiving an intimation that it would be coldly received, and above all that he would get no dedication fee, he changed his mind, and addressed his tragedy to Monsieur MONTAURON, a *soi-disant* MECÆNAS, from whom he received a thousand pistoles. This was every way considered as a merited satire on the two cardinals, and it was fashionable afterwards to call epistles dedicatory, *Epîtres à la Montauron*.

fically calls *Heraclius* the despair of all the tragic authors, and DESPREAUX archly says it is not a tragedy but a *logogryphe**.

Let us see what CORNEILLE himself says upon this subject. "This tragedy," says he, "is more
"an effort of invention than *Rodogune*, and I may
"dare say that it is a happy original, of which there
"will be many copies." He then goes on, explaining the nature of the incidents, in what manner they are knit together, how involved in difficulty and intricacy, and, at length, says that they certainly cannot be comprehended but by reflection after the finish of the piece, and, perhaps, they are not to be enjoyed with taste till the spectators have witnessed a second representation. Certainly this, however it may recommend the piece to a perusal in the closet,

* The best part of the story is that, with all its originality, CORNEILLE is accused of having stolen *Heraclius* from CALDERONE, who beyond all question stole it from him. CALDERONE produced afterwards in SPAIN, a play almost a translation of *Heraclius*, which he called, *In this life every thing is truth and every thing is falsehood*. The fact is, CALDERONE was in PARIS when *Heraclius* first made its appearance. He was introduced to CORNEILLE, who informed him, with the same frankness which accompanied all his conduct, that he had formerly been accustomed, as in the instance of *The Cid*, *The Menteur*, and other pieces, to avail himself of what had been already done by the Spanish poets; but that in the present instance he had the good fortune to present the public with a happy original. This

cannot be in its favour as a dramatic production, where every thing should be comprehended at once. But this piece has given his enemies a handle, as well as some scenes in *Pompée*, to cavil at CORNEILLE, under the idea of comparing his writings to the turgidness, the flatulency, and the obscurity of SENECA, rather than the nature, the simplicity, and the beauty of SOPHOCLES and EURIPIDES, which opinion FONTENELLE does not altogether contradict.

It was not, however, so much the fault of *Heraclius* as the times, that the public attention, which had been so unremittingly paid to CORNEILLE, began to waver. MAZARINE, who found that his predecessor had been indebted, if not for his popularity at least for his notoriety, to poets and actors, was determined to see what fame he could derive from composers and singers. In short it was in 1647 that MAZARINE established the opera in FRANCE, the particulars of which, however, I shall defer till I have gone on with the French theatre to the death of ROTROU.

CALDERONE was very much pleased to take advantage of; and, though perhaps he would have been the first to have acknowledged his obligations to CORNEILLE, the enemies of that great man propagated a report that he had stolen his play from CALDERONE, a calumny he so much despised that he did not think it worth his while to refute it.

It was necessary, however, to introduce the opera here, because it immediately became the rage to such a degree that no dramatic spectacle from that time stood the smallest chance of success that was not recommended to the public by splendid scenery, machinery, and decorations; by which ride of folly we see CORNEILLE borne away as well as the rest; for in 1650, came out *Andromede* ushered to the public by all the foppery of the Venetian opera.

It would be pitiful and unworthy to describe all the particulars of that puppet shew through which the public were now to admire the brilliant talents of the great CORNEILLE. One principal object of admiration was a living pegasus, slung in a way so peculiar, that he sprung into the air and seemed lost in the clouds. The poor horse it seems was kept without food till he was almost starved, and in that condition fastened in the flies to a cord with pulleys so constructed that by a counterpoise his own weight could carry him to the other side of the stage. When it was the proper time for this pegasus to exhibit, a man on the other side, so concealed as not to be seen by the audience, held in sight of the famished animal a sieve of oats. The creature instantly began neighing and pawing; and when he had been sufficiently irritated, the rope that had re-

strained him was loosened and the effort threw him into the air till he arrived at his stable in the clouds where he was recompensed by a good supper for his dexterity.

“ 'Tis true.” says the author of this article, “ we have seen living horses in the Italian opera, “ but none of them had to boast the warlike ardour “ of the pegasus in CORNEILLE’S tragedy of *Andromede*, his movements were admirable, and certainly contributed very materially to the success “ of the piece.” Having settled CORNEILLE so “ comfortably upon his pegasus, or rather upon the hobby horse of cardinal MAZARINE, I shall now go over such circumstances as passed from 1642 to 1650, and particularly numerate the various success of ROTROU.

TRISTAN during this interval produced four plays, which had tolerable success, but not equal to his *Mariamne*, which I have already mentioned as a celebrated piece. SCUDERY brought forward only one, which was his last. It was a tragi-comedy called *Axiane*, and written in prose *. This piece was pro-

* SCUDERY, whose emoluments and preferment came through the channel of RICHELIEU’S bounty, did of course in that statesman’s life time what he was bid, and, therefore, could not indulge his own vein as to writing; in which instance the cardinal for once was cer-

duced in 1643, and though SCUDERY lived till 1667, we hear no more of him as a dramatic writer.

SCARRON, who was born in 1610, and died in 1660, brought out his first piece called *Jodelet ; or the Maître Valet*, in 1645; and four others before 1650. The last of these, *L'Heritier Ridicule*, pleased LOUIS the Fourteenth, when he was young, to such a degree that he had it performed three times in one day. It will be necessary hereafter to speak of this extraordinary man and his productions.

L'ETOILE, a very laboured writer, brought out one piece in 1643, and another in 1647. He is said to have assisted RICHELIEU, and some authors will have it that he was one of the five who sat as the ostensible authors of *Les Tuilleries*, by which it should appear that CORNEILLE did not sustain that disgrace; but I am afraid that we must not flatter

certainly in the right; for finding that SCUDERY had nothing for it but an inflated style borrowed from the school of SENECA, he advised him never to write a play in prose. As soon, however, as the cardinal died, and he had the liberty of writing without a dictator, he indulged the bent of his own inclinations and wrote *Axiane* in prose; when his muse, being unaccustomed to walk without stilts, hobbled so wretchedly that the piece was not only consigned to oblivion but the author too; for this failure, added to the dislike the public conceived against him for meddling with the reputation of CORNEILLE, induced him at the persuasion of his friends to lay down the employment of a dramatic writer.

ourselves with any such hopes, for VOLTAIRE, and many other authors have taken so much pains to ascertain the fact, that it is my unwilling duty, as a historian, to set it down for truth.

LA SERRE, a curious author, and a whimsical character, brought out in 1643, a tragedy called *Sainte Catherine*, and another the following year called *Thésée*. He wrote five other wretched plays, some of which, however, through the influence of RICHELIEU, had great success; in particular *Thomas Morus*, first performed about six months before the cardinal died. It was represented at the Palais Royal, and seems to have been one of the cardinal's last efforts to injure the reputation of CORNEILLE*.

* A public print of that time, evidently under the influence of the cardinal, gives the following account of *Thomas Morus*. "This play acquired a reputation which no other of its time ever had. Cardinal RICHELIEU was melted into tears whenever he was at its representation; he gave public testimony of his high esteem for it, and persuaded all the court to follow his example. *Le Palais Royal*, was too small for the concourse of people that crowded to it, and four porters were killed in one evening endeavouring to keep away the multitude. This is," says the paragraph writer, "what I call a good piece. Monsieur CORNEILLE has never had such powerful proofs of the excellence of his productions, and I never will permit him to rank before LA SERRE till any one of his pieces shall have excited so much public curiosity as to be the death of five porters."

LA SERRE was librarian to Mounfier, brother of LOUIS the Thirteenth, and had a superficial knack, in consequence of his acquaintance with catalogues and the names of authors, of writing a great deal without method or coherence. Nobody, however, felt or acknowledged this more readily than he did himself; for, being totally without disguise, he allowed that his propensity was the *cacothesis scribendi* and nothing more; which, as it turned to such good account, he indulged in order to catch the attention of so profitable a patron as the cardinal. Having attended one day to a very long and tiresome public discourse, he embraced the orator as he descended from the rostrum. "My dear friend," said he, "I did not think such a thing was possible." "What?" said the other. "What!" replied LA SERRE, "why you have uttered more nonsense in an hour than I have been able to write in twenty years, and yet I have tried hard too."

LA SERRE used to say that he boasted one advantage that no author had ever done before him; "for," said he, "I get rich by writing wretched productions, while men of merit are dying of hunger*." When he was reproached with the

* I know not what the inexperience of LA SERRE might induce him to believe; but I fancy, though he conceived the application to have belonged only to himself, it is a lamentable truth that it ever has been and ever will be but too general.

promptitude with which he wrote, he answered that his pegasus had golden wings and would not be restrained, "So I even," said he, "throw the rein over his neck for I have so little relish for what is called fame that I would rather get a fortune and spend it merrily than be miserable in this world and save up money to build a monument for me after I die*.

This strange character, who appears to be more knave than fool, but who certainly was the indifferent writer he himself represents, would never have examined books any further than to dust them, if he had not been induced to try his hand at the instance of RICHELIEU.

LA CALPRENEDE, who enjoyed, in some degree, the favour of RICHELIEU, and who was, as report goes, much indebted to the great CONDE for some episodic parts of his pieces, was a native of GASCONY, and a dramatic poet. He produced in all thirteen pieces, four or five of which appeared between 1642 and 1650. To his patrons, however, he is indebted for his reputation, if it may be said

* "The fact is," said LA SERRE one day to a confidential friend, "I beg, borrow, and steal, to such a degree in my productions, and have so little ability of my own, that this library of Monsieur may very properly be compared to a seraglio, the books to beautiful women, and myself to the eunuch who guards them."

that he had any. He read his comedy of *Clariente* one day to RICHELIEU, who told him that the piece was tolerably good upon the whole, but that the expressions were *lache*; a word signifying, as to writings, loose, careless, negligent, and, as to men, cowardly. “*Cadefis*,” said the author, in the true gasconade style, “I would have your eminence know that nothing *lache* ever belonged to the house of CALPRENEDE.”

GOMBAULT, of whom there is nothing remarkable but that he was one of the members of *beaux esprits*, formed under CONRADE, which gave rise to the French academy, brought out two pieces during the intermediate period at which we are arrived. He was certainly a man of talents, but he was rather a general poet than a dramatic writer.

I come now to speak of THOMAS CORNEILLE, who was born at ROUEN, it has been said on the very day, certainly in the same year, that his brother brought out his comedy of *Melite*.

He followed the same career of his brother, but with less success, though some think he adhered more strictly to the rules of the theatre, a

negative merit which, upon proper occasions, the great CORNEILLE knew how to despise. "DES-PREAUX," says a French author, "did right to call him the Norman younger brother, but wrong to say he has written nothing reasonable. This satirist had, perhaps, forgotten that many of his pieces keep the stage with reputation*."

As these brothers go on hand in hand, I shall have plenty of opportunity to notice their different merits. At present I shall only speak of such pieces as T. CORNEILLE brought out before the year 1650. His first piece a comedy, called *Les Engagements du Hazard*, came out in 1647, it was taken from two pieces of CALDERONE; one having the same title, and the other *The house that has two doors it is difficult to guard*. His next comedy produced in 1649 called *Les Feint Astrologue*, is also taken from a play of CALDERONE under the same title, *El Astrologo Fingido*; which, two years before, had however been brought forward at the theatre by D'OUVILLE, brother of BOIS-ROBERT, whom I shall presently have occasion to mention.

These pieces, and *Don Bertrand de Cigarral*,

* This observation was written about the year 1772.

which came out early in 1650, are all I shall speak of at present from T. CORNEILLE, which as the first and second were taken from CALDERONE, and the other from DON FRANCISCO DE ROXAS, and after all was a mere farce, though in the minority of LOUIS the Fourteenth, it was certainly performed at court more than twenty times, amount yet to nothing that promises for him a reputation likely to keep pace with his brother.

D'OUVILLE was an author of inconsiderable merit, and it well might be so if he was as he is represented to have been much inferior to his brother. The pieces he brought out from 1642 to 1650, were *Jodelet Astrologue*, almost copied as abovementioned by T. CORNEILLE, *The Coeffeuse a la Mode*, and *Les Soupçons sur les Apparence*, in all which he is supposed to have been assisted by BOISROBERT.

BOISROBERT in 1646 brought out *L'Inconnue*, which was taken from CALDERONE, and almost in the same manner with T. CORNEILLE's first piece *Les Engagemens du Hazard*. This did T. CORNEILLE but little service, but he excused himself by saying that he had long written it but had reasons for keeping it back. BOISROBERT brought out before 1650 also *La Jalouse D'elle Même*, translated from *Lopes de Vega*.

BENSERADE, a writer of merit, about this time produced two or three plays. He was born of a noble family in NORMANDY, in 1612, and intended for the church, of which body he was expected to have made a very respectable member, but his destiny decided otherwise; for having seen Mademoiselle BELLEROSE, a beautiful woman, and a favourite actresses, he soon exchanged his breviary for a cast book, and his saints for the muses. It is astonishing with what avidity he cultivated his theatrical employments. Nothing came amiss, as we shall see when we find him composing Ballets in conjunction with QUIN-AULT and LULLY. By the liberality of the queen, cardinal MAZARINE, and several other persons of rank, he acquired a large fortune, which he enjoyed uninterruptedly till his death, which happened, at the age of eighty, in an extraordinary manner.

He had suffered some time the greatest agonies from the stone; which, notwithstanding his advanced age, he was determined to get rid of by cutting. His courage, however, was put to a proof still more extraordinary, for a surgeon, who by way of preparation had been instructed to bleed him, wounded an artery and was so alarmed for fear of the consequences that he fled without binding up the arm. BENSERADE, therefore, bled to such a degree that assistance came too late, and they had just time to

call in a confessor when he expired with great firmness in the arms of his friends.

When we have seen the success of ROTROU's remaining pieces, we shall have before us every thing of any material consequence that was opposed to CORNEILLE from the death of RICHELIEU till 1650. PARIS at that time swarmed with authors, and so indeed it has from that time to this; but my limits will not permit me to give more than the leading features of dramatic productions and events.

ROTRou brought out ten pieces during the interval we are speaking of, and all with a considerable degree of reputation particularly *Cofroes*, which has been often revived with success, *Don Lopes de Ardonne* which was proclaimed worthy the pen of CORNEILLE, and *Venceslas*; which, in addition to what has been said of it already, was revived by MARMONTEL, and begat a literary dispute that I shall notice in its place, highly honourable to the reputation of ROTROU.

In short, taking in all the circumstances, we must certainly place ROTROU as a dramatic writer of France. He possessed all the requisites of a poet in this description. He knew character, conduct, and discrimination; he had the good sense to

reject, as much as the times would permit him, that barbarity which characterised the French stage; and, though his own talents were not of weight and consequence enough to attempt the Herculean task of cleansing this Augean stable, yet when he found CORNEILLE had resolutely undertaken this labour, he certainly lent him a respectable helping hand. So that we may fairly say, if CORNEILLE had never lived, ROTROU would have enjoyed the first rank in his time as a dramatic poet; but CORNEILLE having lived, ROTROU moved only in a secondary sphere, although his reputation derived more splendour from the reflection of this luminary than it ever could have boasted from its own proper power. At the same time it must be acknowledged that the reputation of CORNEILLE derived no mean addition from the literary race, in which he was very often hard run, that with strenuous exertion he gained from ROTROU.

CHAP. X.

THE OPERA, AND CORNEILLE'S FIRST RETIREMENT
FROM THE STAGE.

As the opera very materially deranged the state of the theatre about this period, it is necessary it should be mentioned here, but I shall defer the account I mean to give of its origin till I have brought the French stage forwarder, lest it should prove too much a digression, and so cool the interest that naturally rises from a progressive account of tragedies and comedies.

I shall, therefore, content myself with introducing this species of entertainment, which rendered the French stage a model for scenery to the neighbouring nations, which has been the source from whence our opera has been supplied with dancers; and which first conquered sense in favour of sound, and afterwards sound in favour of agility, by quoting the words of VOLTAIRE.

“It is to two Cardinals,” says he, “that tragedy

“ and opera owe their existence in FRANCE. COR-
“ NEILLE served an apprenticeship under RICHELIEU with other authors, who worked as amanu-
“ enses at those dramatic plans which were in-
“ vented by the cardinal, and in which he intro-
“ duced some very bad lines.

“ Cardinal MAZARINE was the first who intro-
“ duced operas, which was a bungling business,
“ however, a circumstance the more extraordinary
“ as that minister did not write any part of them.

“ In 1647 arrived from ITALY a troop of Ita-
“ lian singers, decorators, and an orchestra. They
“ performed in the Louvre the tragi-comedy of
“ *Orpheus*, in Italian verse, set to music. The per-
“ formance set all PARIS asleep. Very few un-
“ derstood Italian, fewer had a taste for music, and
“ every body hated the cardinal.—The piece was
“ hissed, the cardinal ridiculed, and the French
“ grew outrageous against a man who had pre-
“ sumed to use an endeavour to please them.

“ In the beginning, however, of the sixteenth
“ century, they had ballets in FRANCE, and in
“ these ballets some vocal music, relieved by cho-
“ ruses, which, indeed, were little more than the
“ plain gregorian chant. Nay, there are accounts

“ of Syrens who sung at the wedding of the Duc
“ DE JOYEUSE, so early as the year 1582, but I am
“ afraid they were strange Syrens.

“ Cardinal MAZARINE was so little discouraged
“ at the bad success of his Italian opera, that as
“ soon as he came into full power, he sent again for
“ a troop from his own country, who performed *Le*
“ *Nozze de Peleo et de Thetide*, in three acts, and, to
“ make all sure, LOUIS XIV. danced at this wed-
“ ding. The French were charmed to see their
“ king young, graceful, and of a figure both no-
“ ble and amiable, after he had been hunted from
“ the capital, dancing in it as if nothing had hap-
“ pened.

“ Notwithstanding the cardinal and his Italians
“ pleased as little on repetition as at first, MA-
“ ZARINE still persisted. He sent for signor CA-
“ VALLI, who brought out in the gallery of the
“ Louvre the opera of *Xerxes*, in five acts, but
“ unfortunately the French went faster asleep than
“ ever, and all their consolation was that they
“ should be relieved from the opera by the death
“ of the cardinal, who, indeed, drew on himself a
“ thousand ridiculous sarcasms, and gave place to
VOL. 1. S S

“ almost as much satire after his death as had been
“ levelled at him during his life.

“ The French had some taste for opera, but
“ they were determined it should be their own
“ language, and performed by their own country-
“ men. The last, however, was pretty difficult, for
“ there was but one passable violin in PARIS.
“ However, in 1659, a certain Abbe PERRIN, who
“ took it into his head he could write poetry, and
“ one CAMBERT, leader of the queen's twelve
“ fiddlers, which were called the Music of FRANCE,
“ produced a tiresome pastoral, which however stole
“ the palm from *L'Hercule* and *Le Nozze de Peleo*.
“ In 1669, the same PERRIN and the same CAM-
“ BERT associated themselves with the Marquis DE
“ SOURDEAC, a great mechanist, not absolutely
“ mad, but very little short of it, for he ruined
“ himself in this enterprize.

“ Their first opera was *Pomona*, in which they in-
“ troduced a great deal about apples and artichokes.
“ After this they represented the *Pains and Plea-*
“ *sures of Love*; and at length LULLY, who now
“ became superintendant of the king's music, re-
“ paired the Tennis-court which had ruined the
“ Marquis DE SOURDEAC. The Abbe PERRIN,

“ who did not chuse to be ruined, consoled himself
 “ with writing elegies and sonnets, and translating
 “ the Eneid of Virgil in what he called heroic verse.
 “ As for CAMBERT, he quitted FRANCE in dud-
 “ geon, and went to perform his detestable music
 “ among the English, who thought it excellent *.

“ LULLY, in conjunction with QUINAULT,
 “ brought out the *Fetes de L'Amour et de Bacchus*,
 “ but neither the words nor the music was worthy
 “ the reputation the piece acquired. Connoisseurs
 “ greatly admired however a translation of that
 “ charming Ode of Horace, *Donce gratus eram*
 “ *tibi, &c.* This ode is, to say the truth, finely
 “ rendered into French, but the music is extremely
 “ dull. There were buffooneries in plenty in these
 “ operas, and indeed they were full of harlequin-
 “ ades; and QUINAULT, to his shame, did not dis-
 “ dain, as a man of his genius ought, to lend assist-
 “ ance to these puerilities; though in those very
 “ operas—part of which were a reproach to him,
 “ were many choice and beautiful passages.

* As PURCELL, in 1685, says that it was then time the English
 should begin to loath the levity of their neighbours, this observation
 of VOLTAIRE might perhaps partially apply. That it did not ge-
 nenerally, however, such names as BLOW, GIBSON, and others, will
 bear me witness.

“ As for LULLY, he knew pretty well how to
 “ accommodate his music to the French language,
 “ and as he was a pleasant companion, very de-
 “ bauched, and an excellent flatterer, and in con-
 “ sequence admired by the great, he found no dif-
 “ ficulty in carrying away all the applause from
 “ QUINAULT, who was a very contrary character,
 “ being naturally modest, diffident, and unassuming.
 “ He made the world believe that QUINAULT was
 “ his amanuensis, for that all the ideas were his,
 “ and that QUINAULT clothed them in better
 “ French than he could; in fact, that but for him
 “ this admirable poet would only have been known
 “ by the satires of BOILEAU: and thus QUI-
 “ NAULT, with all his merit, became a prey to an
 “ ill-natured satirist, and an impudent musician.

“ Thus the beauties, whether simple, delicate,
 “ or noble, which were spread through *Attis*, and
 “ his other pieces, which ought to have established
 “ the reputation of QUINAULT, procured no credit
 “ to any person but LULLY, who was considered
 “ as another APOLLO*.

* The instances of arrogance in LULLY in this way are incredible,
 When QUINAULT had written some scenes of the opera of *Phæton*,
 he submitted them to the academy, who passed their judgment, and
 acquiesced in the propriety of the alterations which were afterwards

We have here from VOLTAIRE a pretty, lively picture, generally taken, of the opéra, which I shall take leave of for the present, to release CORNEILLE from the ungracious situation in which we left him, and see what became of Thalia and Melpomene.

The extraordinary success of *Andromede*, so little to the taste or the reputation of its author, gave an entirely new complexion to tragedy, and it seemed no longer to rely on its intrinsic merits. Simplicity, beauty, strength in the style, art, management, and conduct in the situations, and nature, force, and interest, in the incidents had nothing to do with the matter; the machines were the object, and the play was only a vehicle to introduce them.

What then must become of CORNEILLE, who could neither paint flying dragons, nor mount a pasteboard mermaid upon the back of a leathern

made. LULLY, however, chose to correct the piece a little more, from which critique he insisted there should be no appeal, though he altered more than half of it.—Query then whether the harlequinades that Mr. VOLTAIRE complains of were not attributable to LULLY.—When THOMAS CORNEILLE wrote *Bellerophon*, LULLY seized him to death. He had twenty times an intention of giving up the work, and at last did not accomplish it till he had written, out of complaisance to this presuming musician, more than two thousand lines unnecessarily.

dolphin. He seemed so astonishing with his prance in the air that when he came upon the ground he forgot how it was to walk naturally.

It is wonderful how men of the first abilities will conform to bad taste. At that moment; alone, independent, adored by the public, and his reputation at its summit, if CORNEILLE had met this innovation half way, if he had acknowledged that scenery in FRANCE had been defective, that it was a grand, a sober, a decorous appendage to tragedy, giving assistance to the action of the piece, and, therefore, proper to be encouraged, but that, nevertheless, he should resist with all his influence the introduction of machines and other mechanical operations, which, though ingenious in themselves, disgraced tragedy, and lowered it to the level of pantomime; he would not only have kept his own fame up to its legitimate standard, but all other writers, who seeing CORNEILLE missed, were glad enough to have recourse to this new vehicle to fame to bolster up their ownrickety reputation, would have remained at their posts. By this means tragedy would have kept within the pale of its own province.

As it was, did CORNEILLE do this? No. If the Mountain had refused to go to Mahomet, Mahomet

would have been glad enough as formerly to have gone to the Mountain. But this was not the case, CORNEILLE, immoveable, had he chose to have remained so, fluctuated, trimmed, and accommodated himself to the caprice of the times.

Andromede was followed up in 1651, by a heroic comedy called *Don Sanche D'arragon*; which, by the usual assistance of machines, had some eclat, but was soon withdrawn and performed only in the provincial towns. This piece was not in the style of CORNEILLE, being taken from two Spanish plays, which had been first romances, and it would have been better for his reputation if it had never been produced,

CORNEILLE himself attributes the want of success in this piece to its having been prohibited. Why he does not tell us. His excuses, however, are but lame, for he confesses that by his taking his piece from the Spanish stories he was entangled in the last act, that he was obliged to bring a man from the clouds to make the necessary discovery for the catastrophe. The fact is, CORNEILLE giving into the new taste turned projector. The piece is properly neither tragedy nor comedy, and, therefore, heterogeneous and unworthy CORNEILLE.

Nicomede, which came out in 1652, was another experiment. CORNEILLE seems at this time to have grown tired. He owns that this piece is upon an extraordinary construction. "But," says he, "it is my twenty-first production; after having written forty thousand verses, it was not very easy to find any thing new without going out of the high road of nature to search for such ideas as are excited by extraordinary objects." This declaration might have served BOISROBERT, or RICHELIEU, but CORNEILLE should have disdained it.

"Tenderness, and the passions," continues he, "which are the soul of every tragedy, has nothing to do with this." Upon what then could he ground his success? "Grandeur and courage only are to be found here, such grandeur and such courage as have no other support than that love of virtue which is imprinted in the heart of nations." Without tenderness! Strange doctrine.

This piece, but for some applications to a popular event, which parts of it contained, would have had but indifferent success. CORNEILLE, however, was at all times so idolized by the people, that some time after when BARON, who was considered as the French Roscius, and almost permitted

to do any thing, attempted to alter some passages in a way as he thought more to the public taste, the house, as with one voice, insisted that the diction of CORNEILLE should not be violated, and obliged him to repeat his part exactly as it had been originally written.

Pertharite, his next piece, produced in 1653, was literally damned, and CORNEILLE immediately retired from the theatre, with a declaration that he would never return to it. This resolution he kept six years, which time I shall take to speak of MOLIÈRE, who brought out his first play in the very year when CORNEILLE had declared he had brought out his last.

CHAP. XI.

MOLIERE AND THE STAGE TO CORNEILLE'S
RETURN.

JEAN BAPTISTE POQUELIN, so celebrated under the name of MOLIERE, was born at PARIS in 1620. He brought out his first piece in 1653, and died in 1673*. Birth, which in no instance that ever was read of either conferred or precluded talents, was not among the advantages MOLIERE had to boast. Both his grandfather and his father were valets des chambres and tapestry-makers to LOUIS the Thirteenth, and his fate would have been to cut up tapes and bindings, and hang parlours and bed-chambers, had not his genius induced him to consider these only as secondary objects, and such as might humbly serve to decorate those better representations of nature with which she had given him the talent of ornamenting his country.

MOLIERE for the first fourteen years followed

* SHAKESPEAR and MOLIERE died at the same age.

the business of his father, and a patent was even taken out for him as successor to his father's charge; but he would neither yield to this nor would those friends, many of whom was celebrated characters about the court, who witnessed the growing merit of this youth, consent to his remaining uninstructed in those studies by means of which they were satisfied he would arrive to some extraordinary reputation in either literature or the sciences.

He was in consequence sent to a college at CLERMONT, where he got intimate with CHAPPELLE, BERNIER, and CYRANO*, who were all pupils of the famous GASSENDI, from whom the young POQUELIN imbibed with great avidity those precepts of philosophy which taught him afterwards so well to reason, and which served as the

* CYRANO, born the same year with MOLIERE, was a most extraordinary character. He was of a generous spirit, and as courageous as a lion. He was a cadet in the regiment of guards, and became the terror of all the bravoes of his time. There is a story of his attacking a large party of desperadoes who had way-laid one of his friends, and either killing or wounding seven of them. For his coolness and valour in the field he was called *L'Intrepide*. He had been frequently wounded, and at last he died at the age of thirty-five of a wound in the head which he had received from a pistol ball fifteen months before. He caught a taste for writing from MOLIERE, and his *Pédant Joue*, which has been imitated on our theatre, is by no means destitute of merit.

foundation of that reputation which guided him through the greatest part of his works.

A taste for dramatic entertainments having pervaded all FRANCE in consequence of RICHELIEU's patronage of the stage, many societies in the nature of our private theatricals, a little upon the principal of the old title of *Les Enfants Sans Souci*, united in domestic parties to perform plays. POQUELIN made one in a society of this description, which was called the Illustrious Theatre.

Here he changed his real name for that of MOLIERE, which circumstance of changing names was extremely common in FRANCE among the poets and actors, but in MOLIERE is said actually to have arisen from a fear of contaminating the race of valets des chambres and tapestry-makers, who thought it a greater honour to remain blockheads and receive christian burial, than to amuse and enlighten mankind and be rewarded with a sentence of excommunication*.

* This distinction has been the parent of numberless pleasantries, some of which I shall from time to time set down. At present the only one that occurs to me is this. A French actor having amassed a sum of money he bought an estate, which they call *seigneuriale*, and we call a manor. The first Sunday he went to church, it being the curate's duty to offer up prayers for this new seigneur, he was

In this society MOLIERE became acquainted with a woman of the name of LE BEJART, who had been a country performer; and as he found her sentiments of the same cast as his own, he agreed that they should form a company and go to LYONS, where *L'Etourdi* was first performed. This was in 1653, and its success was so prodigious that it fairly ruined the other company of comedians established in that town; many of whom begged leave to join MOLIERE, who, with his company thus strengthened, went to LANGUEDOC, and offered his services to the Prince of CONTI, who then held his court at BEZIERS*.

This prince had known MOLIERE at college, and had not only been present when he performed at PARIS, but had very often invited him to his palace. *L'Etourdi*, with the protection of this prince, experienced at BEZIERS new success. He

extremely embarrassed in what manner to pray for a person excommunicated by the church. There was no help for it however; and being driven into a corner, "My dear brethren," said he, "let us pray for the conversion of such a one; sinner, comedian, and lord of this parish."

* The Prince of CONTI who held MOLIERE in real estimation, entreated him to remain with him in quality of secretary; but happily for the French theatre, though he had the highest sense of the honour offered him, he preferred following the impulse of his own genius.

brought out also some farces, one of which was called *Le Docteur Amoureux*, and another *Les Trois Docteurs*; which, being trifles, he very properly afterwards suppressed.

Having travelled with his company to GRENOBLE, he went first to ROUEN, and afterwards to PARIS, where he determined, if possible, to fix. By his connections he got access to Monsieur, who presented him to the king and the queen-mother; they saw him and his company perform, and granted him permission to exhibit in the Guards of the old Louvre, and afterwards in the Palais Royal. At length his company was retained in the service of the king, in 1665, and this was the commencement of a real taste for comedy in FRANCE.

Le Depit Amoureux, which had been performed at BEZIERS in an imperfect state, was brought out at PARIS in 1658, with great success; but *Les Precieuses Ridicules* was the first comedy that permanently fixed the reputation of MOLIERE. At the finish of the first nights representation of this piece, a crony of his, took our old acquaintance CHAPELAIN by the hand, "You and I," said he, "approved all those "subtle criticisms which abounded formerly in "compliment to our old friend the cardinal; but "believe me we have been taught to night so much

“ real taste, that we ought to burn all we have admired, and to admire all we have burnt.”

The success of this piece fairly shewed MOLIERE upon what ground he stood. “ I will no longer be reproached,” said he, “ with copying PLAUTUS, and TERENCE, and studying MENANDER. In future I have nothing to do but study the world.”

The Precieuses Ridicules was performed at court, though the royal family were at that time on a journey to the PYRENEES. On their return the price to MOLIERE'S theatre was doubled. Admission to the parterre before that time had been only six sols.

I shall now speak of QUINAULT, who for a considerable time was not allowed that share of merit he certainly possessed; nay, to this moment, such is the force of prejudice, that his name in the general idea of French literature is seldom classed respectably, though there can be no doubt but that upon the whole he was the best lyric poet FRANCE ever knew*; a species of merit surely that stands very high in the gradation of literary fame.

* When I say this I mean a writer of poetry proper for music;

We have seen already that VOLTAIRE considered QUINAULT as a man of abilities. This opinion many other French writers have unequivocally confirmed, but a better proof, a perusal of his works, will establish for him that reputation which has been so often denied him; for, in those works, among a great deal of trash written to humour LULLY, is to be found great and striking poetical beauties, such as BOILEAU, with all his bitterness and invective against a man who had never offended him, had neither the soul nor the capacity to write.

QUINAULT, however, in great measure deserved every syllable that has been said against him. His permitting an arrogant, impudent musician to appropriate to himself quietly and comfortably that genius and those talents which were legitimately in the poet and not in him, was as unpardonable as it is inconceivable. But it should seem that if LULLY laughed at QUINAULT, QUINAULT laughed at LULLY; for, pardoning every advantage the musician took on the side of reputation, the poet had

which, I take to be the true unadulterated sense of the word lyric; for taken to that extent which it often usurps it is capable of any thing but harmony, and I could name lyric odes that if a composer were inspired with the genius of APOLLO he would yet be incapable of setting them to music.

his revenge on the side of profit, or rather prudence, for while LULLY dissipated his emoluments, QUINAULT took care of his affairs. He married the widow of a merchant, who had been his kind friend, with a fortune of forty thousand crowns; he bought a considerable charge in the auditory of accounts; he was admitted into the French academy; he was honoured with the *Cordon de St. Michel*; and died in PARIS in 1688, at the age of fifty three, with a fortune of more than a hundred thousand crowns.

AS QUINAULT employed his talents more for the opera than the theatre, we shall have but little to say of him at present. His tragedies, except *L'Astrate*, and *L'Agrippa*, have disappeared from the theatre, and even those are weakly written: his heroes are no more than gallants, and his subjects are no higher than pastoral and romance. His comedies are superior to his tragedies, and his *Mere Coquette*, and one or two others, give good expectation that if he had pursued this style of writing he would not have cut an inconsiderable figure even by the side of MOLIERE.

QUINAULT's first piece for the regular theatre was a tragi-comedy called *Les Rivaux*. It came

out in 1653, and caused a considerable change in the mode of recompensing dramatic authors for their labours. It had been the custom to buy performances of authors for such prices as should be agreed upon, which was sometimes regulated according to the merit, but oftener according to the reputation of the writer, for the merit and the reputation are now and then distinct things. In general, however, these productions were sold low enough, the actors at that time having had the same hold of the authors in FRANCE as the booksellers have now in ENGLAND.

This comedy of *Les Rivaies*, which was little more than a copy from ROTROU, TRISTAN, of whom QUINAULT was the *eleve*, undertook to read to the actors under an idea that he could make a better bargain for his pupil than his pupil could have done for himself. The actors charmed with the piece, and upon a supposition that it was written by TRISTAN, offered a hundred crowns for it. Being undeceived, however, they told TRISTAN, that though QUINAULT appeared to have talents, yet as he had no established reputation, they could not risk that sum for the piece, but would, at all adventures, give fifty crowns; TRISTAN would not suffer QUINAULT to accede to this, and the matter was compounded by an agreement to give the au-

thor a ninth of every night's receipt during the run of the play, provided that afterwards it should belong exclusively to the actors.

These terms were accepted, and the proposal appeared so fair and judicious, both on the part of authors and actors, that it has been strictly observed ever since; after-pieces, by way of proportion, bearing only the value, those in two acts of a twelfth, and those in one of an eighteenth.

QUINAULT after producing three plays with passable success, brought out, in 1656, a piece called *Les Coups de L'amour and de Fortune*; but SCARRON tells us that this play is not at all attributable to QUINAULT, for that TRISTAN wrote the first four acts, and that he himself wrote the fifth after TRISTAN died.

SCARRON'S pieces, from 1653 to 1659, were *Don Japhet D'Arménie*, *L'Ecolier de Salamanque*, and two others. The first he introduced by the following burlesque dedication to the king:

TO THE KING.

“ SIRE,

“ ANY other *Bel-esprit* but myself would have

“ began with telling your majesty that you are
 “ the greatest king upon earth; that you were
 “ more knowing in the art of reigning at fourteen
 “ years old than the oldest greybeard; that you
 “ are the best made among men much less among
 “ kings; and, in short, that you have nothing to do
 “ but to stretch out your arms and touch the top
 “ of Mount Lebanon and as much farther as you
 “ please. All this is very handsome and virtually
 “ true; but I shall say nothing of it here. I shall
 “ only say, that since your power is so great I
 “ entreat you to use it to do me a little good;
 “ for if you were to do me a little good, I should
 “ be much merrier; if I were much merrier, I
 “ should write merrier comedies; if I were to write
 “ merrier comedies, you would be more diverted;
 “ and if you were more diverted, your bounty
 “ would not be thrown away. All this seems so
 “ reasonable that I am persuaded I should think
 “ the conclusion fair, even were I as great a king
 “ as your majesty, instead of a poor miserable
 “ devil as I really am, but nevertheless

“ Your majesty’s

“ Very obedient,

“ And very faithful subject and servant,

“ SCARRON.”

L'Ecolier de Salamanque, which came out in

1654, gave rise to a most bitter quarrel between SCARRON and BOISROBERT. SCARRON had a custom of reading his works to his acquaintance, one of whom was BOISROBERT, who was so struck with the circumstances of this play as he heard it piece meal, that he did not scruple to build his *Genereux Ennemis* upon this foundation; which, indeed, was not all, for T. CORNEILLE worked *The Genereuse Ennemis* into *The Illustres Ennemis*, and both these copies of SCARRON's play came out before the play itself; so that it had to encounter all the disadvantage of the first and second impression of it. But it did not stop here, for BOISROBERT did his utmost to decry the merit of *L'Ecolier de Salamanque*, and abused SCARRON for stealing it from him, whereas he knew the contrary to have been the fact.

This treatment SCARRON never pardoned; and, being a much better writer than BOISROBERT, he threw out his invectives against him in a strain of such severe and bitter satire that BOISROBERT felt their effects as long as he lived.

T. CORNEILLE during his brother's absence acquired some celebrity. From my last accounts of him to 1659, he produced eight pieces. The first three had merely passable success, and the fourth

called *Les Illustres Ennemis*, was even less attended to on account of its being borrowed, as I have already said from BOISROBERT, who stole it from SCARRON. His fame from thence, however, began to rise, and, indeed, to wear so new an aspect that he no longer seemed to be the same writer*.

The tide of T. CORNEILLE's reputation took a most extraordinary turn in 1656, when he pro-

* This has been charitably accounted for under an idea that his brother, having retired from the theatre, lent him assistance. It is certainly very possible that upon occasion he might have consulted his brother, and his brother him; for it is remarkable that no two brothers ever lived in closer union, nor had so many natural and fortuitous ties to bind this compact of affectionate alliance. They lived under the same roof, they married two sisters whose ages had the same disproportion as their own, each had exactly the same number of children as the other, and every thing relative to their fortunes was so in common between them that they lived in this style more than twenty years before they came to any settlement as to how their different affairs were situated, which would not, probably, even then have taken place had not prudence dictated what proportion ought honourably to be assigned to each, that their families might know what they had to depend upon in case of death, or any casual alteration in the establishment of their children. All this is so remarkable that it is impossible but they must have consulted each other in their writings; but yet it should seem that it was merely as to opinion and nothing else, for never was there so marked a difference between two writers; the great CORNEILLE had too splendid a genius servily to buckle to regularity, and his brother had little more than that measured regularity which never yet boasted the splendour of genius.

duced, *Au Marais*, *Timocrate*, which piece, though its merit is indisputable, was so eagerly followed and so suddenly dropt that the circumstance will ever remain a monument of French capriciousness. This tragedy was performed eighty times in regular succession without the intervention of a single performance. For the last twelve or fourteen nights the actors attempted to announce other plays. The audience would not hear a single syllable. *Timocrate* was called for, and *Timocrate* they were obliged to perform. At last an actor came forward and said, "Ladies and gentlemen, if you are not tired of seeing *Timocrate*, we are really tired of performing it. We run the risque of forgetting all our other pieces, and the stage will sustain the greatest injury. Permit us to represent something else." This permission was granted, and *Timocrate* was never afterwards performed at that theatre*.

Nay, the circumstance is stronger yet. When

* The capriciousness of the actors was at least upon a par with that of the audience. If TIMOCRATE filled their theatre it was not only a present advantage but an advantage ultimately in favour of the old pieces when they came to take their turn. I should like to see a TIMOCRATE upon the English stage for two reasons. If an English audience permitted a piece to run eighty nights, it would be a proof of its merit, and they are too fond of fostering merit to consign it so suddenly to oblivion after having taken it so warmly under their protection.

this piece was in this extraordinary manner laid by at the theatre *Au Marais*. The company of the *Hotel de Bourgogne*, by infinite degrees the best performers, took it up ; but there seems to have been facination in the stupid and impolic speech of the actor just mentioned ; for after two or three ineffectual attempts to attract the audience they totally withdrew it.

Nevertheless *Timocrate* is well spoken of. T. CORNEILLE's friends advised him to stop there, for that his reputation was ratified. The king went to the theatre on purpose to see it, and spoke of it in the highest terms ; and people in general began to declare that the retirement of the great CORNEILLE was no longer a loss to the theatre. By what I can learn it was a cold regular piece, and owed half its success to the idea that the great CORNEILLE was concerned in it ; for so little did his friends continue in opinion that it was his best production, that it is not among his works now printed, and I am told that it was lost to the world soon after it was lost to the theatre.

T. CORNEILLE's next piece, *Berenice*, a tragedy, was brought out in 1657 ; he brought out *Commode* in 1658, and *Darius* in 1659. *Commode* was the greatest favourite of these three but they

all received a reputable degree of applause. The theatre, however, seemed at this time to want a counter balance in tragedy to the strides that MOLIÈRE was taking in comedy, and every interest was made, and at last effectually, to prevail on the great CORNEILLE to resume his situation as supreme director in the empire of MËLPOMENE.

VOL. I.

X X

CHAP. XII.

FROM CORNEILLE'S RETURN TO 1663.

AFTER *Pertharite*, CORNEILLE, as we have seen, retired from the stage; and as every material trait in the character of so great a man is of consequence to the public, I hope it will not be considered as extraneous if we see how he employed his time.

Having been all his life a devout christian, and particularly intimate with some Jesuits, which body were ever remarkable for profound erudition and classical taste, he undertook at their particular instance to translate a celebrated work called *The Imitation of Jesus Christ*, which he is allowed to have rendered very finely. It had prodigious success, and made him ample amends in point of profit for the loss he had sustained by quitting the theatre. But the best judges agree that it was not a work properly in his style, and the nature, the simplicity, and the truth of the original, was lost in that pomp and grandeur

that every where pervaded the great mind of CORNEILLE.

FONTENELLE says, in the true style of a writer properly skilled in literary beauty, " This book, though for grandeur and force the finest that ever came from the hand of man, has so little of the Evangelist that it cannot, like that, penetrate immediately to the heart, nor seize the mind with that force, so natural and tender, which sometimes is greatly assisted by a negligence of style*." I hardly know if FONTENELLE complimented most himself, by the candour, or CORNEILLE by the truth of this observation.

It is not known whether it was by the persuasion of his friends, or through the bent of his own propensities, which after all must have inclined him towards the stage, that CORNEILLE was induced once more to take up the pen as a theatrical writer. Both these considerations might probably have had some

* That this is a truth every susceptible mind must bear me witness; yet if it be a truth what becomes of VIRGIL and so many others who have built reputations, adamantine reputations, upon Almighty style. May I be so fortunate before I quit this work to rescue a little the cause of genius from these barbarous fetters, and to contribute a little assistance, a very little I fear, to the separation of nature and truth from plausibility and sophistry.

weight, of which it is not impossible but MOLIERE'S rapid progress towards dramatic fame in some degree accelerated the preponderance.

It is certain, however, that FOUQUET, superintendant of the finances, applied very warmly to CORNEILLE upon this occasion, and that his application was backed by others in power; nay, when the poet complained that he should find himself awkward in an employ to which he had been sometime unaccustomed, and remarked that he had not even thought of a subject, the financier, fertile in expedients, proposed three subjects; the first of which he agreed to treat, the second he recommended to his brother, and we have no account of what the third was, or whether it was adopted or not.

Oedipe, which had prodigious success, completely reconciled CORNEILLE to the theatre and the public. *La Toison D'or* was performed in 1660; and here I am obliged already to remark that CORNEILLE could not with all his merit resist that furor for machinery and decoration which then raged in FRANCE; for on the contrary he allied himself with the very marquis DE SOURDEAC, of whom we have heard VOLTAIRE speak with such contempt.

The Toison D'or was performed originally at the

Chateau de Neubourg, in NORMANDY, at the feat of the marquis DE SOURDEAC, in honour of the marriage of LOUIS the Fourteenth, and the peace with SPAIN. This nobleman, besides the persons necessary to execute the different departments of this spectacle, entertained five hundred gentlemen of that province for two months at his own expence, during which time the *Toison D'or* was represented every day.

In *Sertorius*, performed in 1662, CORNEILLE appeared more himself. It was greatly admired and deservedly. It displays a magnificent portrait of Roman grandeur, in which the sentiments, the manners, the very minds of those ferocious heroes are depicted in a style peculiarly vernacular; but, indeed, in treating Roman subjects, CORNEILLE is every where at home. Marshal TURENNE is said to have exclaimed at the representation of this piece, "Where could CORNEILLE have learnt so perfectly the art of war."

BOILEAU, however, never contented, will have it that the scene between POMPEY and SERTORIUS, which FONTENELLE, who by the by was a better writer and a more sensible man, thinks one of the finest in the French language, did not deserve to have been so much applauded. "It is full of

spirit," says he; "I grant; but it has neither reason
 "nor nature to support it, for who to SERTORIUS,
 "an old and experienced captain, would compare
 "POMPEY, who is hardly man enough to have a
 "beard *."

Sophonisba was the next tragedy produced by CORNEILLE; it came out in 1663. This subject had been treated frequently on the French theatre, and there can be no doubt but the original model was a tragedy, under the same title, written in Italian by the Prelate TRISSINO, so early as 1514, af-

* I should not have noticed this silly remark of DESPREAUX, were it not that I am happy at all times to expose envious cavil, and ignorant ill nature. Minds are of all ages, and there are as innumerable instances of their being matured early in life as of silliness and dotage in old men; and, if this be true, these are the circumstances which ought to be introduced on the stage, being in nature and yet peculiar. If the remark of this snarling satirist be admitted what becomes of the glory of ALEXANDER, CHARLES the Twelfth of SWEDEN, and all those heroes who achieved wonders and yet died before they attained the prime of life. But this will ever be the way with those who cavil at what they cannot imitate. It is difficult to admire real merit in an author while you are obliged to despise the man. But in BOILEAU, and I don't despair of proving it, you must despise both the man and the writer; and nothing can more fully prove that he was neither born a poet nor a philanthropist, than his *Art of Poetry*, the servile echo of an echo; where the only truth to be found is his pretended modest declaration, which he would not have made had he expected it to have been believed, that the poem has no other merit than being decked in the spoils of HORACE.

terwards imitated by MARMET, MONCHRETIEN, DE MONTREUX, and MAIRET, or, as has been already explained, VIAUD THEOPHILE, which last piece kept the stage with celebrity.

On this account CORNEILLE has been blamed for bringing out a tragedy on the same subject, and, indeed, envy, at the success of MAIRET, has been kindly considered as his motive; but not only the known character of CORNEILLE contradicts this invidious report, it is completely refuted by his own declaration, in which he pays a compliment to his predecessor more flattering to his reputation than the play was capable of procuring him, and which he ought to have been very proud of, even vanquished as he was by his more able competitor.

But let us look after MOLIERE. It should be known that MOLIERE occupied with his company, a third theatre *Au Petit Bourbon*, with the permission of the king, where he performed alternately with the Italians, of whom I shall at a proper time give the history. This theatre was afterwards pulled down to build the grand entrance to the *Louvre*, and the king then took him into the *Palais Royal*, first called his company *La Troupe de Monsieur*, and afterwards *La Troupe du Roi*.

La Cocu Imaginaire came out in 1660. This little piece is taken from an Italian comedy called *Il Cornuto per Opinione*. It was performed forty times in succession, though in summer and during the absence of the court*.

Don Garcia de Navarre was produced in 1661, MOLIERE performed the part of DON GARCIA; and finding that serious acting was by no means his forte, had the good sense to make a resolution not to perform any but comic parts from that time. This piece, which was a heroic comedy, though chastely written, did not succeed; and the reputation of MOLIERE, through the industry of his enemies, of whom he had at all times undeservedly a plentiful number, suffered for a time from this disgrace. A short time, however, for the success of his next piece amply consoled him for the mortification he had sustained by the fall of this.

* A tradesman in PARIS took it into his head that MOLIERE meant in this piece a personal affront to him. "How dare the fellow," said he one day to an actor, "ridicule a man like me on the stage?" "Come, come," said the actor, "you have no reason to complain. He has painted a flattering likeness by only making you a cuckold in imagination: I would not have you to make too much stir about it for fear he should make you a cuckold in reality."

L'Ecole des Maris made its appearance in 1661. It was the first piece that MOLIERE brought out at the *théâtre du Palais Royal*, and the first that he printed. In quality of chief of the company of Monsieur, he, therefore, dedicated it to that prince.

This comedy, which served as a model for English and other authors, is taken from a *Tale* by BOCACE, which every body knows. The only difference in the two plots is that, in BOCACE, a woman in love with a young man makes her confessor the go-between, who carries letters and presents under an idea that he serves the purposes of devotion; and, in MOLIERE, an old man is substituted for the confessor, who is duped in the same manner by a girl he is in love with and to whom he is the tutor.

L'Ecole des Femmes, MOLIERE's next comedy, was performed for the first time in 1662. So divided began to be the French at this time as to MOLIERE; that under the idea, probably, of his commencing ARISTOPHANES, and issuing personalities from the stage, whereas he in fact personated men only by personating manners, he sustained all sorts of affronts. The public were extremely divided as to the merit of this play. It gained ground, however, and brought a great deal of money. These

cabals induced MOLIERE in the following year to write a piece which he called *L'Critique de L'Ecole des Femmes*.

This piece was the first of the kind that ever appeared on the French theatre. It is rather a dialogue than a comedy; MOLIERE, however, is to be commended for having written it, for he very happily, while he points out the faults of his play, turns its enemies into ridicule. *The Mercure Galant*, conducted by a man of the name of VISE, who was constantly sticking in MOLIERE's skirts, has the kindness thus to criticise this piece by anticipation.

“ We are to see in a short time a piece entitled
 “ *La Critique de L'Ecole des Femmes*, where the au-
 “ thor, *soi disant*, is to enumerate all the faults in
 “ his piece, and to excuse them at the same time.
 “ Curious, that a man should take so much pains
 “ to defend a piece which is not his own, but written
 “ by the Abbé du BUISSON, who is one of the
 “ most gallant men of the age. But MOLIERE has
 “ the audicity to deny this. He says that the
 “ Abbé certainly did write a piece on this subject
 “ and bring it to him, and that he could not help
 “ allowing it considerable merit, though he had his
 “ reasons for not performing it. What does all this
 “ say? That this cunning comedian, whose best
 “ merit is to know how to take advantage, dis-

“ cerned in the Abbé’s piece something that could
“ please the public, and so palmed it upon them
“ as his own.”

The Abbé might have written a piece upon this subject, but it was perfectly unnecessary that MOLIERE should copy that piece, for he had only to go to the same source where the Abbé derived his materials, which was a book entitled *Le Nuits facétieuses du Seigneur Straparole*; which is a history of a man who communicates to his friend all that passes between him and his mistress, not knowing that his friend is his rival.

But it now became pitiable to see pieces on the theatres in the shape of disjointed critiques; and really it is to be regretted that MOLIERE, in imitation of the sun when the flies wanted to put him out, did not shine on instead of condescending to notice the swarm of tiny critics that surrounded him. As it was, the cabal against him, though it did not injure him, gave him great inconvenience, and more than one critique, which would have died away forgotten, became noticeable to the public by his pointing it out.

BOURSAULT, a writer of real merit, and who was now coming forward, took occasion to render

himself popular by bringing out at the *Hotel de Bourgogne*, a piece called *Le Portrait du Peintre*, which was not only a critique of *L'Ecole des Femmes*, but produced at the same time; and contained, as far as he could learn or imagine, the same matter of *MOLIERE*'s piece under that title*.

MOLIERE now began really to be piqued, and he brought out in the same year his *Impromptu de Versailles*, levelled directly at *BOURSAULT*, whom he treated with the greatest contempt and derision; reserving to himself, however, a degree of nobleness; for this contempt, and this derision went no further than the genius and talents of *BOURSAULT*, whereas *BOURSAULT* has descended in his strictures on *MOLIERE* to attack his private character.

This piece also is a most severe and successful satire on the performers at the *Hotel de Bourgogne*, whom *MOLIERE* considers as having instigated *BOURSAULT* to ridicule him; and, indeed, though

* This the reader sees was no difficult matter; for nothing could be easier than to select the known and acknowledged faults of *L'Ecole des Femmes* and excuse them exactly the way that its author would do. This was what struck *BOURSAULT*, who succeeded so well in his design that at last it was said, in addition to *MOLIERE*'s having stolen his *Ecole des Femmes* from *L'ABBE DU BUISSON*, he stole his critique of *L'Ecole des Femmes* from *BOURSAULT*.

no one could commend this spirit of party between two bodies whose business was only to entertain the public, yet *MOLIERE* received and deserved great praise for the able manner in which he conducted this controversy; for, in answer to their pityful invectives which he scorned to imitate, he contented himself with pointing out their faults as performers, particularly the sleepy monotony of their declamation, which he did with such judgment that the ridicule which followed this discovery drove them into a corner and they were obliged to correct their faults or be laughed at; and thus *MOLIERE*, in resenting a private injury, did a public benefit.

BOURSAULT, whom I shall now introduce, was one of those extraordinary proofs that shew us how infinitely genius ranks before education. He was born at *BOURGOGNE* in 1638, and died in *PARIS* in 1701. We find him at the age of twenty-three bringing out successful comedies, and two years afterwards entering into a controversy with a man of *MOLIERE*'s wonderful talents, though he could speak nothing but a provincial jargon called *Patois*, no more like French than *Erse* or *Irish* is to English, at thirteen, and had then first to learn to write, and afterwards to chuse what language he should write in.

It was not long, however, after he came to PARIS, which was in 1651, before he taught himself to write and speak French elegantly; and, what may appear very extraordinary, without knowing a word of Greek or Latin, his style was fraught with the native purity of the ancients. But I cannot find any thing irreconcilable in this. Nature taught them, nature taught him. Neither they nor he had been tainted with the foppery of the schools.

His conception was so strong, his ideas were so true, and his fancy was so pliant, that he had nothing to do but to think and write. His happy genius accommodated itself to every style. His tragedies manifest a firm mind and a strength of conception equal to a description of the noblest passions. His comedies contain lively pictures of men and manners suitable to all ranks, all ages, and all times. He is serious, comic, moral, and lively without violating the rules of taste.

It must now be recollected that I am speaking of his best and latest productions. In his early ones, there is certainly, and it would be wonderful if there were not a great deal of trash; but there are traits of genius every where, and he arrived at last to a taste so pure, and a style so chaste, that "he was

“ correct without affectation,” to use the words of various French writers, “ and ought to be considered “ as the literary lawgiver to the language of that “ nation.”

There is something so peculiar in a character of this description that I cannot help dwelling on BOURSAULT a little longer. His fame soon reached the court, and having at the express desire of LOUIS the Fourteenth, written a book called *La Veritable Etude des Soverains*, by the way a bold undertaking, the king was so charmed with it that he appointed him preceptor of Monseigneur, but he could not ratify the appointment because BOURSAULT knew nothing of Latin, an indispensable qualification for that post.

The Duchess of ANGOULEME made BOURSAULT her secretary, and engaged him to write a Weekly Gazette in verse. LOUIS and his court were greatly entertained with this work, but BOURSAULT having aimed some satiric tracts against the Franciscans in general, and the Capucins in particular, the queen's confessor used such powerful interest that the Gazette was suppressed, and the author's pension of two thousand livres taken away, and had not very high friends interfered this poetical newsmonger would have gone to the Bastile.

All the time BOURSAULT had this controversy with MOLIERE, in which there is certainly a great deal of the vivacity and folly of a young man, he had besides his *Portrait du Peintre*, brought out three pieces, all which succeeded. They had, however, glaring faults, but gave wonderful promise of something better.

CHAP. XIII.

FURTHER SUCCESS AND DEATH OF MOLIERE.

AS MOLIERE'S career for the next ten years, at the end of which he died, makes up a very brilliant interval in the French dramatics, I shall follow it unmixed with any other circumstances but such as result from it, in order to do every justice to a man of such uncommon merit.

La Princeſſe D'Elide was performed in 1664, and made up a part of thoſe ſuperb entertainments which LOUIS the fourteenth, in compliment to his mother and his own queen, gave under the title of *Des Plaiſirs L'Iſle enchantée*. Theſe fetes, which continued ſeven days, and were conducted with great magnificence and taſte, united all that could be got together of the true and the marvellous, in ſhort, a kind of entremets regulated and diſpoſed ſo as not to outrage the underſtanding. The Italian VIGARANI, an ingenious mechanift, furniſhed the decorations, the celebrated LULLY compoſed

the music, the President de PERIGNY wrote the complimentary odes, BENSERADE produced a variety of light and lively eulogiums, and MOLIERE introduced this comedy, all which, with the assistance of various appropriate devices and well timed applications, contributed to render this fête very celebrated.

The king gave MOLIERE but a very short time to prepare his comedy. He borrowed the fable from *Augustin Moreta*, and was so pressed that he could only put the first act and part of the second into verse.

Le Mariage Forcé was performed in 1664. This piece originally came out at the Louvre, accompanied by a ballet under the same title, in which LOUIS the fourteenth danced *.

* The famous Count de GRAMMONT furnished MOLIERE with the idea of the *Mariage Force*. This nobleman, while he resided in LONDON, fell in love with a young lady of the name of HAMILTON. Their amours even made some noise; when, on a sudden, he set out for FRANCE without taking leave of the family. The brother of the young lady, who now began to look upon the affair as a little equivocal, followed the count to DOVER with a determination to call him to account. He encountered him before he had opportunity to embark, and asked, in a tone which sufficiently gave him to understand what he was at, whether he had not forgot something at LONDON? The count, who, perhaps, was ashamed of him-

Le Festin de Pierre made its appearance as written by MOLIERE in 1665. This strange subject has been so often treated, and in so many languages and shapes, that it is unnecessary to say much about it. It was first brought out on the Italian stage, afterwards on the Spanish, then on the French, by at least five authors, MOLIERE and T. CORNEILLE two of them, and at last the English, whose good sense would have revolted at witnessing a representation of it in dialogue, have contented themselves with seeing this abominable subject danced throughout the kingdom from the opera to all the puppet shews. MOLIERE has nevertheless thrown great strength and beauty into this horrid piece, on purpose, one should imagine, to shew that the worst subject may be treated well by a good master of his art,

L'Amour Medecin came out in 1665. MOLIERE all his life had been an enemy to all the tribe of GALEN. His motives have been variously attributed, but it is most probable that they originated from his inveterate hatred to every species of hy-

self and glad of an opportunity to atone for his conduct, answered with perfect good humour, " You are certainly in the right. I really
 " forgot to marry your sister, but to convince you how glad I am that
 " you put me in mind of it, I'll return with you and offer her my
 " hand."

pocrisy. He defines a physician to be a man who chatters nonsense in the bed-chambers of the sick either till nature has cured, or physic killed the patient. To give this piece all the effect he could, MOLIERE had masques which were likenesses of all the court physicians, and these he wore as he represented different medical characters.

The names also pointed out who were meant. *Desfonandres*, which signifies man-killer, was meant for De FOUGERAIS, who always prescribed violent medicines; *Bahis*, which signifies to yelp, was designed for M. ESPRIT, who fluttered; *Macraton* was pointed at GUENAUT, because he spoke remarkably slow; and *Tomés* which means a bleeder, was levelled at D'AQUIN, who upon all occasions ordered phlebotomy.

Le Misanthrope in five acts, and in verse, was performed for the first time in 1666. This piece failed at its first representation; but MOLIERE withdrew it and brought it forward again in a month preceded by the *Fagotier*, or *Médecin malgré lui*; which had such success that it was performed three months in succession, but always with *The Misanthrope*. The farce saved the comedy.

This play, however, soon made its way by its

own proper merit. It has not only been considered as the best of MOLIERE's productions but the best comedy ever written; but enthusiastic praise is in general an injury to authors. MOLIERE's enemies who could not bear this warmth in his adherents, set themselves to work every way to lower his piece in the opinion of the public. Ridiculously enough, however, and without success*.

Melicerte, a heroic pastoral, made its appearance in 1666. MOLIERE wrote only the first and second acts of this piece, and in that unfinished state it was performed at St. GERMAIN. It was afterwards enlarged by GUERIN, son to the actor of that name, but neither then, nor before, was it considered as a dramatic production of much consequence.

Le Tartuffe, a comedy in five acts, and in verse, came out in 1667. Nothing, perhaps, ever made more noise than' this comedy; nor was ever theatrical representation more severely persecuted. Fops, physicians, misers, fools, and other general

* Among other endeavours to injure MOLIERE, an effort was made to persuade the Duc de MONTAUSIER, who was remarkable for the austerity of his manners, that in the *Misanthrope* MOLIERE had attempted to draw his character. The duke went immediately and saw the piece, and, as he left the theatre, was heard to say, that he should be happy, indeed, if it were true that he resembled the *Misanthrope* of MOLIERE.

characters, were even seen to laugh at themselves, and kiss the very hand from which they received their castigation; but hypocrites are a species of men, more vindictive and more numerous, consequently more severe and more powerful.

The hypocrites took this comedy as a declaration of war against human nature; for where is there to be found, said they, a body of men among whom hypocrisy is not practised? In short this exposition was a crime not to be pardoned, and the piece was beset with an industry and severity incredible. It was artfully insinuated that it attacked religion; that the *Tartuffe* was an impious insult against GOD himself; that it was abominable, and that it ought to be burnt by the hands of the hangman.

The three first acts of the *Tartuffe* having been privately represented before the king on the twelfth of May, 1664, his majesty defended MOLIERE against his persecutors, and that this might have the better colour, he ordered that the piece should be examined by the most celebrated writers of the time, whose determination in its favour he bespoke by saying that he himself found nothing in it but what was perfectly harmless, and, indeed, meritorious.

The hypocrites finding MOLIERE so greatly

supported, were indefatigable to procure a cabal against the *Tartuffe*; for they insisted, after all, that neither kings nor learned men, but the public alone, were to judge of dramatic representations.—Devotees were consulted, who being generally weak men, joined sincerely in a cause which they thought did honour to religion and virtue. A poor infatuated curate undertook, at all hazards, to pronounce that it was a work full of profaneness and impiety, and that in quality of priest he had a right to anathematize the author.

The king, on the other hand, permitted the piece to be performed, but in order to qualify the matter—for though he disapproved of his people's folly, he wished to conciliate their affection—he advised that it should be called *L'imposteur*, and that the principal character should appear as one of the laity*.

* It is certain that MOLIERE, who was always a spectator at the farce of *the world*, took many traits of his *Tartuffe* from real life. The very name which signifies hypocrite, or more properly false devout, owed its rise to an accident. MOLIERE being in the palace of the Pope's nuncio during the time he worked at his piece, which was then intended to be called *The Impostor*, he was walking in the cloister with two ecclesiastics, who were holding forth on the piety, the forbearance, and the abstemiousness of the nuncio. During the intervals of conversations, however, some few hints concerning the bill of fare for the day, gave MOLIERE a strong idea that the representative of his holiness had some little regard for the good things of this world as well as the next. At length he understood that one very high and expensive dish, that was generally served up to dinner,

MOLIERE read the *Tartuffe*, before its representation, to Madam NINON DE L'ENCLOS, who tasted its drift in a very sensible and competent manner. She said that this species of hypocrisy had been her particular study, that nothing could be so meritorious as to detect it; and enlarged upon the subject with so much judgment and experience, that MOLIERE declared she was more capable of treating it than he was *.

would that day lose much of its poignancy, for want of some truffles, of which they were disappointed. Just at this time came by a man with truffles to sell. At this the comode ecclesiastics, whose business was more to subscribe to the pleasures of the nuncio than to pray to heaven, cried out *Tartusoli, Signor Nuncio, Tartusoli*. From this MOLIERE is said to have changed his title of *L'imposteur* to *Le Tartuffe*. Another circumstance was as follows: LOUIS the fourteenth, as he marched towards LORRAINE, accepted an invitation of a certain bishop to his house. The bishop represented that, being fast-day, he could give his majesty but a very indifferent dinner. One of the courtiers smiled at this, the reason of which, after the prelate had retired, the king insisted upon his explaining. The courtier said he could not avoid smiling to think that the prelate should call such a dinner as they were going to receive an indifferent one. Though, indeed, it was not so good as the good bishop often sat down to, even when alone. On this he rehearsed the particulars of the bill of fare. At the mention of every luxury, the king cried out, each time in a different tone, *the poor man*. MOLIERE, who attended in quality as *Valet de Chambre*, overheard this scene, and so availed himself of the circumstance, as to introduce the effect of it into the piece, at which the king, when he was informed of it at VERSAILLES, laughed heartily.

* One of the instances which NINON gave MOLIERE of hypocrisy is related by VOLTAIRE in her life. He says—"When M. de GOURVILLE, who was considered for twenty-four hours as the

Though *MOLIERE* founded his character of the *Tartuffe* upon hypocrisy and bigotry in general, yet it is universally allowed that the Abbe *ROQUOTTE*, Bishop of Autun, sat for the portrait, and that those particulars in his character, of which *MOLIERE* was ignorant, were furnished by *DESPREAU X*, not immediately in communication to *MOLIERE*, but through a letter, written however expressly for his information, and addressed to Monsieur *GUILLERAGNES*.

On the second representation of the *Tartuffe*, there came an order of parliament for its suppression. The court, for probably political reasons, did not immediately interfere; but, however, two years afterwards, the king gave a peremptory order that it should be performed, which order was never after disputed.

“ successor of the great *COLBERT*, in 1661 fled from *FRANCE*, lest
 “ he should be hanged in person as he had been in effigy, he left be-
 “ hind him two cassettes full of money. One of these he confided
 “ to *M. NINON DE L'ENCLOS*, the other to a devotee. On his re-
 “ turn he found the money left with *NINON* in good condition; nay,
 “ it had considerably encreased by her management. Grateful to find
 “ he had been so well dealt by, he insisted that *NINON* should accept
 “ at least the overplus as a gratuity for the trouble she had taken.
 “ She told him very coolly that she had considered herself as a friend,
 “ and not a usurer, and pleasantly said if she heard any thing more
 “ about it, she would throw both cassette and money out of the
 “ window. The devotee chose another style of conduct. He said
 “ that he had employed all the money in pious uses, for that he had
 “ more regard for the soul of *Mr. GOURVILLE*, than to suffer him
 “ to enjoy riches that had been acquired by means for which, without
 “ repentance, he must expect to be damned.”

MOLIERE was now flattered by his enemies. The opposers of the *Tartuffe* either pretended to espouse its interest, or retired discomfited, and in disgrace.—While, however, the public clamour ran high, it is inconceivable how loudly this comedy was reprobated. The famous Father BOURDALOUE preached against it, and as such a circumstance has something uncommon in it, I shall extract a passage from his sermon*.

“As,” says he, “true and false devotion have great similitude in their outward appearance; as the same raillery that attacks the one *prima facie* attacks the other; as it is impossible to know the true from the counterfeit, without an examination of the hearts of men; as hypocrisy cannot be censured without raising unjust suspicions against true piety, all virtuous men ought to decry such a work.

“What has this author done? He has represented on the stage an imaginary hypocrite, who, by his actions, turns the most holy things into ridicule; who appears scrupulous on matters of no conse-

* It was archly enough said to MOLIERE—‘You would never have been censured by the priests if you had not taken it into your head to introduce sermons on the stage.’ To which MOLIERE answered, “For my part I see no more harm in sermons on the stage than in farces in a pulpit.”

“ quence, but in affairs of importance is guilty of
 “ the most enormous crimes; outwardly a penitent,
 “ he is inwardly a profligate; and under an appear-
 “ ance of the most austere piety, he practises the
 “ most consummate villainy.

“ Who will point out in the world this particular
 “ man? It is impossible, and it cannot be applied
 “ but by an unworthy suspicion of religion in ge-
 “ neral, and the principles of its possessors in par-
 “ ticular. This is cruel and immoral, and no go-
 “ vernment ought to tolerate it.”

To the confusion, however, of those priests who wrote against the *Tartuffe*, many others countenanced it as a most valuable work, which placed virtue in its right light, and censured none but those who felt themselves pointed at as hypocrites and bigots.

But nothing can prove so strongly the absurdity of this conduct as the toleration given at this time to other dramatic pieces, which were really full of impiety. In a piece called *Scaramouche Hermite*, an anchoret, dressed like a monk, pays a visit to a married woman's bed-chamber by a ladder of ropes, and, like RANGER'S “Up I go,” as he ascends, repeats very ludicrously *Questo per mortificar le carne*.

During the suspension of the *Tartuffe*, this piece

was one night performed in the presence of the king, who, on quitting his box, said to the great CONDE, ' I should be glad to know why those who think themselves so scandalized by MOLIERE's *Tartuffe*, should so quietly suffer, nay even loudly applaud *Scaramouche Hermite* ?' " For the best reason in the world, Sire," answered the prince, " Scaramouch only laughs at religion, which these holy gentlemen do not care a farthing about ; but the *Tartuffe* laughs at themselves, which they can never forgive."

Le Sicilien was performed in 1667, and written by MOLIERE to retrieve that reputation which he fancied he had lost by joining with BENSERADE and others, as we have seen in the productions of such pieces as were merely written to assist machinery and decoration. The *Sicilien* is a charming trifler, and was greatly received.

Amphitrion appeared in 1668. This subject, which had been frequently treated since PLAUTUS, and by ROTROU in particular, with great judgment, proved, even in the hands of MOLIERE, of an unfavourable nature. We have seen it on our stage, and every body knows its indelicate tendency. Even in FRANCE it revolted the audience, though every body admired the poetry. Madame DACIER wrote a dissertation to prove that the *Amphitrion* of PLAU-

Tus was greatly superior to that of MOLIERE; but upon hearing that MOLIERE intended to produce his *Femmes Sçavantes*, she thought proper to suppress it.

George Dandin was brought out in 1668; first before the king at VERSAILLES, with airs and music, and afterwards at PARIS merely as a comedy. This piece, which was irresistably laughable, had considerable success*.

L'Avare, in five acts, made its appearance also in 1668. This celebrated comedy had very nearly been damned because it was written in prose, the very reason which ought to have ensured its success; for as no man wrote more naturally than MOLIERE, so his verse, though admirable for French poetry, took off all the spirit and warmth of the dialogue; a fault attributable, without exception, to all the French writers of comedy in verse. *L'Avare*, however, after a time became a great favourite, and was variously translated for the purpose of exhibition in other countries.

* MOLIERE is said to have derived the principal part of his success, on the production of this piece, from ingratiating himself with the person ridiculed, and making him the patron of his own exposition. It is even said that, thus managed, the real GEORGE DANDIN made parties to support this comedy, and thus got laughed at off the stage as much as his representative on it.

Pourceaugnac, in three acts, was performed in 1669. It was interspersed with dances and songs. The music by LULLY*.

Les Amans Magnifique, in five acts, in prose, made its first appearance in 1670, with singing and dancing. The music by LULLY.

BENSERADE had attacked MOLIERE on account of the jealousy that had taken place at the time of the *Fete* at VERSAILLES in 1664. This begat a quarrel, which at different times broke out and subsided; till, at length, MOLIERE determined to take a pleasant revenge. BENSERADE was protected by a nobleman of the highest rank, who had often scornfully insisted that MOLIERE could not write such verses as BENSERADE. When, therefore, MOLIERE brought out his *Amans Magnifique*, he wrote one entire scene so much in the manner of BENSERADE that his patron, believing it absolutely to be his, declared that MOLIERE did well to court the assistance, of a writer so superior to himself. In the interim, BENSERADE, conscious that he had no hand in it, did not know how to act. At last he brazened it out and received the compliments of all his

* I enumerate these pieces with all possible brevity, except when some striking circumstances attended them, because they have most of them been treated on the English stage, and will, therefore, necessarily become objects of future animadversion.

patron's friends with as much satisfaction as if he had really been the author of the scene; till MOLIERE, who watched for this opportunity, declared publicly that BENSERADE had neither written, nor been concerned any way in the piece, and thus held up both the poet and his patron to public ridicule.

Psyché, a kind of tragi-comedy, in five acts, interspersed with songs and dances, was performed in 1670.

MOLIERE wrote only the first act, part of the second, and part of the third of this piece, the rest was written by the great CORNEILLE, QUINAULT, and other friends. The music was composed by LULLY. It was written for the king, and there was so little time allowed, that MOLIERE was obliged to call in the assistance of these allies.

Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme first appeared in 1670. It had prodigious success, and has always been considered as one of the most celebrated plays on the French theatre*.

* At the first representation of this piece, the king refused to give his opinion of it, and all the courtiers taking his silence for an unwillingness to condemn the production of a man whom he protected and admired, shrugged up their shoulders, and among one another did not hesitate to speak of it with the most sovereign contempt. This mortified MOLIERE severely; and when he found that BARON, to whom alone he discovered his chagrin, had learned that the court-

Les Fourberies de Scapin, in three acts, and in prose, was brought out in 1671. This piece is nothing more than one of those farces improved, which MOLIERE wrote in PROVINCE, under the title of *Gorgibus dans le Sac*. The wits were very severe against MOLIERE when this piece came out. BOILEAU, who seems never to have been pleased in his life, inserted in his *Art of Poetry* these lines :

Dans le Sac ridicule, ou Scapin S'enveloppe,
Je ne reconnois plus L'auteur du Misanthrope.

This piece was taken partly from the *Phormio* of TERENCE, and partly from one of the pieces of a farce writer called TABARIN, with which circumstance in another place BOILEAU reproaches MOLIERE in these words :

D'avoir, a TERENCE, allie TABARIN.

He was also accused of having stolen two scenes from the *Pedant Joué* of CYRANO; but he answered

tiers had so spread their ill-natured sentiments, that all PARIS were infected with them, he gave his piece up for lost. The king, however, signified a wish to be at the second representation of it; and, after it was over, he told MOLIERE that he had not ventured to declare his opinion on the first performance, for fear he might have been seduced and have mistaken those passages which were so provokingly laughable for wit, when they were only bombast; but that he had attended that evening with great care, and had found the piece so full of rich and warm traits of nature, that he was prepared to pronounce it a most admirable comedy. The courtiers hearing this came round MOLIERE in crouds; and, for every injurious invective they had levelled at him before, loaded him with a hundred compliments.

to this that he originally lent these scenes to CYRANO, and that it was lawful for a man to take his own goods wherever he might find them. The fact is, by introducing prose, he endeavoured to introduce nature; and, therefore, displeased a people who delighted in every thing artificial.

Les Femmes Sçavantes, a comedy in five acts, and in verse, was produced in 1672, and very shortly became celebrated. A combination of circumstances induced MOLIERE to write this play. He had been pestered with so many ignorant and vain strictures, which were levelled at him entirely from malignant and envious motives, that he resolved to revenge himself; a propensity, by the by, that he oftener indulged than was either wise or prudent*.

* In this instance so complete an opportunity offered that he could not resist it. At the *Hotel de Rambouillet*, which was the rendezvous of all the *beaux-esprits*, MOLIERE had a general invitation; but finding about this time, that the would be wits who found admittance there determined as much as possible to ridicule him, he very sensibly withdrew himself. This drew on him a thousand squibs, particularly, from MENAGE, L'ABBE COTIN, and Madame de RAMBOUILLET. About this time COTIN had a dispute with DESPREAUX, whom he loaded with the most injurious language; and, among other things, said that he acknowledged neither God, nor Faith, nor law. Unfortunately for him he lugged MOLIERE, into the dispute, who resolved to give him no quarter. He, therefore, put the finishing stroke to the *Femmes Sçavantes*, where he drew on COTIN a ridicule and a contempt, that stuck by him as long as he lived. One circumstance in particular rendered him completely ridiculous. MOLIERE was determined to make COTIN, under his title in the piece of *Trissotin*, or three times fool, produce a sonnet as ignorant and ludicrous as

Le Comtesse D'Escarbagnas, a piece in one act, was brought out in 1672, and intended as a pleasant ridicule of provincial manners. It revolted those who, like COTIN, affected to have taste, but the public in general admitted it as a fair and merited laugh against peculiarity and absurdity.

Le Malade Imaginaire, the last production from the pen of MOLIERE, and generally allowed to be the most perfect, appeared in February 1673. Its success, which had been warm and universal, was interrupted on its third representation by a most fatal accident; indeed nothing less than the death of the author. MOLIERE had been long afflicted with an asthmatic complaint which he increased by intense application to the duties of his situation *. He was

possible. BOILEAU hearing of this produced for MOLIERE a sonnet actually written by COTIN, as a compliment to Madame de NE-MOURS, which was in every respect as contemptible as they could wish. This being introduced, and afterwards made known as the real production of COTIN, it may very easily be conceived how it operated with the public.

* About two months before the death of MOLIERE, among other friends who had repeatedly advised him to retire from the stage, at least as an actor, BOILEAU was one day very pressing. He represented to him that the continual exercise and agitation of his lungs in those exertions, so violent, which were necessary for the performance of arduous characters, must naturally, by increasing his complaint, at length, endanger his life. MOLIERE replied, that he considered it as his duty to render vice hideous, and that it redounded to his honour to castigate the manners. The satyrist, probably piqued that he had not succeeded, cried out "A pleasant duty to render vice hideous

more than usually incommoded on the day he died, and his friends entreated him, his wife, and his friend BARON in particular, to take repose. "What," said he, with that philanthropy which was the peculiar mark of his private character, "is to become of so many poor wretches who scarcely get bread by my means? I should reproach myself were I to neglect them for a single day."

He grew better about noon, and prepared for the performance; and by the time he appeared on the theatre, the concern of his friends was a good deal dissipated. His efforts, however, to give effect to his part, visibly augmented his complaint; and when in the divertissement in the third act, he pronounced the word *juro*, he fell into a strong convulsion. He was immediately carried home; where, in spite of every assistance and attention, he grew worse; till having fallen into a violent fit of coughing, he irrupted a vessel and was instantly suffocated with blood.

MOLIERE being dead, the actors were determined to bury him with unexampled magnificence. HARLAI, archbishop of PARIS, would not, however, consent to his having christian burial. The wife of MOLIERE, as soon as she heard this, went to VERSAILLES and threw herself at the feet of the king,

"by blacking one's face with Indian ink, and to castigate the manners
 "by turning one's back every now and then to receive twenty
 "bastinadoes."

and complained in the bitterest terms of the injury done to the memory of her husband, who, she said, deserved an altar raised to him, for that he had served the cause of morality more than a hundred bishops. The king gently reproved her, and told her that the matter depended entirely on the archbishop, but promised to see what could be done; which promise he so well kept, that HARLAI the next day revoked his decree, upon condition that the ceremony should be performed privately and without eclat.

Two priests were appointed to conduct the funeral, but forbid to sing, lest the matter should be made too public. This injunction, however, had no effect, for a prodigious concourse of friends with flambeaux attended MOLIERE to the grave, his wife at their head exclaiming as she went "No wonder
" hypocrites should refuse the rights of sepulture to
" a man who was all his life a scourge to hypocrites*.

Exclusive of the pieces enumerated here, MOLIERE wrote, at the time his company performed at PROVENCE, several farces, the matter of which, however, or at least a great part of it, he took into his different comedies.

The rank MOLIERE held in literature has been

* Immediately after MOLIERE's death, PARIS was inundated with epitaphs. Among the rest a poet presented one to the great CONDE, who always had loved and admired MOLIERE. Having read a line or two of it, "Take it away," said he, "you write MOLIERE'S
" epitaph! I wish to God he was alive to write yours."

long estimated and decided. We have nothing to do but to compare his works with whatever we know of, perfect and admirable, in the ancients, and we shall find him in every point of view rising greatly superior to them all. He has all the pointed severity of ARISTOPHANES, without his wickedness and his malignity; he has to the beauty, the fidelity, the portraiture of MENANDER, added higher and more finished graces of his own; he has the nerve and strength of PLAUTUS without his grossness and his obscenity; and he has a thousand times more elegance from nature and genius, assisted by philosophic observation, than TERENCE.

Nature, and the absurdities of the age in which he lived, supplied him with an inexhaustible source of materials. Comedy took a new form in his hands, and became a scourge for the vices and follies of all ranks, to the truth of which all were implicitly obliged to subscribe; and there can be but little doubt, if he could have written independantly, and have been independantly attended, but he would have carried comedy, true comedy as correct as it can be defined, to a higher degree of perfection than any author has done either before or since.

MOLIERE, however, was a reformer; and reformers in any way dare not innovate all at once. Could he have done this, he would have written no dialogue in verse, he would have made his characters at once

Speak the language of nature. But there are higher crimes to accuse him of. Pure morality would probably have been laughed at by a people full of intrigue and given up to every licentiousness; on this account, and I most sincerely believe on no other, did *MOLIERE* introduce his naive and natural humour, his strong remarks, and his sterling truths, through mediums which neither his heart nor his understanding at all times approved.

To make children ridicule their parents, deride their observations, laugh at their age, and insult their infirmities, are circumstances true comedy should reject with contempt; to introduce adultery, and endeavour, by subtle devices and insinuating persuasion, to imprint on young minds a love of vice, is revolting to true comedy; to recommend knavery, by giving it a fashionable air, and permitting it at last to triumph over simplicity and honesty, has nothing to do with true comedy; "but," says a French author, "*MOLIERE*, though truly honourable, was an actor and a manager. It was therefore necessary he should think of the receipt of the house, and this receipt too often imposed silence on his veracity, and of course diminished his real glory. It was necessary to make the pit laugh. Oh that so great a genius should be sunk to so low a degree of humiliation."

If, however, vice, through *MOLIERE*, became at times winning and seducing, he did not fail at other

times to expose it to contempt and ridicule ; but, whenever he did so, it was sure to raise him up a host of enemies. This, in his dependent situation, as we have seen, gave him throughout his life a thousand vexations, and induced him sometimes to conform to the age rather than revolt against it. In short, when he considered himself merely as a poet, he fell into the errors of poets ; when as a philosopher, he shone with all the truth of a moralist, and the dignity of a man.

For the rest. As an actor he possessed a noble figure, a marking and an expressive face, and a clear and commanding voice ; through these he conveyed the utmost force of comic expression into his characters, regulated by an understanding correct, powerful, and commanding. As a manager he made it the study of his life to consider the interest of all those who were embarked with him in his undertaking, according to their respective abilities. He tempered authority with indulgence, determination with affability, and considered himself at the head of his company, as the father of a family by whom he was beloved and revered.

As a man, he was an affectionate husband and a warm friend ; honest, punctual, and just. He was admired by the great, esteemed and valued by his equals, and almost adored by his inferiors, to whom as far as his abilities permitted, he was a generous benefactor.

CHAP. XIX.

RACINE AND THE STAGE TO THE DEATH OF
CORNEILLE.

AS RACINE ran the principal part of his career during the life of CORNEILLE, it would be totally out of regularity to omit an account of that admirable poet and his works in this place; especially as the new turn he gave to dramatic productions, inclined, in some measure, his fluctuating countrymen to neglect his great competitor, whose infinitely superior abilities had created what remained for RACINE to perfect.

JEAN RACINE was born at FERTE-MILON, December, 1639. At what age he went to school historians are not agreed upon; but one should suppose not very young, for it is insisted that in less than a year he read *Sophocles*, and *Euripides*, with taste in their own language. He is said to have manifested early in life an extraordinary genius for poetry, and that his memory surpassed any thing that ever was heard of*.

* Having met with the Romance of *Theagenes and Clariclea*, written by HELIODORUS, his instructor CLAUDE LAUNCELOT, threw it into the fire. RACINE found means to get at a second copy, which shared the same fate. He then bought a third; and having taken a short time to examine it, took it to his master and told him that he might also burn that for he had now got it by heart,

The poetic merit of RACINE appeared evidently in a variety of minor productions, though his Latin poetry injured his reputation, thanks, probably, to those pedants who are the only judges of the beauty of a language no longer spoken. At length, in 1660, the king's marriage set all the poets at work; and upon this occasion RACINE produced a poem called *La Nymphe de la Seine*, that bore away the palm from all its competitors. RACINE from this time delivered himself up entirely to poetry, except when out of complaisance to his uncle, with whom he lived, he dipped into theology. Neither that study, however, nor logic, to which he had deeply attended, could prevent him from giving way to his poetic propensity; and becoming acquainted with MOLIERE, and afterwards with BOILEAU, he determined to try his hand at the drama.

Thébaïde, RACINE's first piece, came out in 1664, for which piece MOLIERE is said to have furnished him with the materials. This, however, cannot be true, for when it appeared it was little more than a revision of *L'Antigone* of ROTROU, which RACINE had adjusted to the theatre, thinking he could not do better than rescue a good performance from obscurity. Afterwards, however, he altered it considerably, and with the assistance of his verse, which was at all times correct and harmonious, it became celebrated.

Alexandre appeared in 1666. RACINE read this tragedy to CORNEILLE, who told him very honestly, for CORNEILLE was incapable of jealousy, that he saw in it wonderful talents for poetry, but not for tragedy. RACINE brought out this piece at MOLIERE's theatre. It was damned. He was afterwards prevailed on to offer it to the *Hotel de Bourgogne*; where, with assistance of Mademoiselle PARC, one of MOLIERE's best actresses who was enticed away from him upon this occasion, it had good success. This treachery begat a coldness between MOLIERE and RACINE which lasted as long as they lived, though it has always been allowed they upon all occasions did each other justice as authors.

Andromache came out in 1667. This tragedy is remarkable for having occasioned two extraordinary circumstances. Mademoiselle CHAMPMELE, of whom RACINE had a very indifferent opinion, so won him that he fell violently in love with her; and MONTFLEURY, in endeavouring to personate ORESTES in his madness, which required the most strenuous exertions, was taken so ill that he soon after died.

Les Plaideurs, a comedy in three acts and in verse, made its appearance in 1668. This is RACINE's only attempt at comedy. A domestic circumstance is said to have given rise to the story, and the characters, as we are told, are all from real life. This comedy had little success at first. MOLIERE, however, did it

justice, and said, that those who railed at that comedy ought to be railed at themselves. At length the king saw it and spoke favourably of it, after which it did tolerably well.

Britannicus was performed in 1669. This piece in spite of its merit failed on its eighth representation. RACINE ushered it into the world with a preface in which he very imprudently treated CORNEILLE with severity; he, however, became sensible of his error and afterwards suppressed it.

Bérénice came out in 1671. The sister-in-law of LOUIS the fourteenth, induced RACINE to write a piece on the parting of TITUS and BERENICE, that circumstance having a resemblance to the separation of her and her brother. RACINE engaged too hastily to comply with this request, and BOILEAU told him that if he had been on the spot he should not have given his word. The subject certainly was not a favourable one; and though, perhaps out of deference to those whom it was intended to compliment, it was pretty well followed, yet it was parodied and quoted so ludicrously that RACINE, always very irritable, became truly sorry he had written it.

Bajazet was brought forward in 1672. This tragedy had good success, but there is scarcely an instance in all RACINE where character is not sacrificed to versification.

Mithridate made its appearance in 1673. The *Pulchérie* of CORNEILLE, performed the year before, which fell in spite of its author's great name, lifted RACINE into considerable fame; he brought out *Mithridate* when this great man, who had perfected every species of dramatic entertainment in FRANCE, was ungratefully shunned and neglected. He might have said with POMPEY, "Dost thou not see that all eyes are turned towards the rising sun!"

Iphigene was performed in 1674. RACINE, and the new taste he had introduced here gained ground and so completely conquered CORNEILLE and nature, that on the following year that great writer retired from the theatre. I shall, therefore, now take him up where I left him, and employ the short remainder of this volume to speak of him and his works.

Othon appeared in 1664. "In which," says FONTENELLE, "CORNEILLE has fairly placed TACITUS on the French stage." The Marshal de GRAMMONT said, "that in *Othon* CORNEILLE was the 'the breviary of kings.'" BOILEAU, however, who was at this time attached both to the writings and the person of RACINE, was not contented with this tragedy because, perhaps, it had none of that tinsel with which he and others at that time corrupted the French taste.

Agefilas was performed in 1666. This piece is said

by some not to have been written by CORNEILLE, but FONTENELLE contends that it was, and points out a scene that he says could not have been written by any body else. The controversies about it, however, prove that it came from no other pen*.

Attila came out in 1667. CORNEILLE piqued at the preference given to RACINE by the company of the *Hotel de Bourgogne*, carried this tragedy to the *Palais Royal*, where MOLIERE received it with great satisfaction. The celebrated THORILLIERE performed *Attila*, and Madame MOLIERE represented *Flavie*. It was well received at first, but the gout for RACINE and declamation carried every thing before it, and *Attila* was soon neglected.

Tite et Berenice, represented in 1671, yielded

* DESPREAUX, the eternal puffer of RACINE, attacked this piece, as it was customary for him to do with every thing written by CORNEILLE. He wrote this Epigram to decry *Agefilas* and *Attila*:

APRES L'AGESILAS,

HELAS!

MAIS APRES ATTILA,

HOLA!

BOILEAU expected that CORNEILLE would have been greatly mortified at this but he turned it to his advantage, and the confusion of the satirist, pretending it was meant as a compliment. The literal words mean "after Agefilas, alas! After Attila, no more." BOILEAU's intention is self evident; but CORNEILLE pretended to believe that it meant, that *Agefilas* had attained every end of tragedy by exciting pity, *Helas* being an interjection of commiseration, and *Attila* was the *ne plus ultra* of tragedy; and that, therefore, the epigramatist had seemed to hope there would never be another.

the victory to RACINE's tragedy under the same title. They were both written to please the vanity of a woman, and RACINE, being a perfect courtier and a young man succeeded best. It was impossible any thing but nature could dictate to CORNEILLE; RACINE perpetually suffered himself to be dictated to by the reigning taste and his friend DESPREAUX.

Pulcherie, brought out in 1672, gave RACINE another triumph. There is, however, a strength of character in it which RACINE never reached; but the tide of prejudice was now so strong against CORNEILLE that he ventured but one more play and then retired.

Suréne was that play. It was performed in 1674, and has some strokes of the master which, perhaps, has not been since equalled; but it failed, and CORNEILLE determined to retire from the busy world and make up his mind to die like a man and a christian*.

CORNEILLE was at the height of his glory when he retired in 1653. The advantage taken of his absence to model the theatres to the rules of art, so enervated the drama, that what it gained on the side

* Besides his dramatic productions CORNEILLE produced a variety of things, both in French and in Latin, all which bear the sterling stamp of an extraordinary and commanding genius; a genius, like the tripod of the Sybil, which it is impossible to approach without feeling a sudden enthusiasm.

of taste and refinement, it lost on the side of simplicity and nature. The grandeur of tragedy in particular sunk after *MOLIERE* had taught them how to admire true comedy, and the softness and effeminacy, introduced by *RACINE*, which, in proportion as it sunk to mere style and regularity lost sight of the sublime, enchained the theatre in the shackles of complaisance and servility; till women, the universal rulers of French fashions, became the arbiters of dramatic excellence, and the courtier bore away the victory from the philosopher, who was now in derision called Old *CORNEILLE*.

He, however, proudly disdained to adopt this new taste. Not because he could not have excelled *RACINE*, nor because his age had enfeebled his mind—both of which observations have been urged against him—for in those scenes of *Psyche*, which he wrote, but did not acknowledge, he has purposely abandoned himself to an excess of tenderness which *RACINE* would have found it difficult to imitate.

CORNEILLE was of a portly stature, he had an agreeable countenance, a large nose, a handsome mouth, and eyes full of fire; the whole effect lively, and marking, and proper to be transmitted to posterity either in a medal or a bust. He knew, as a perfect master, *Les Belles Lettres*, history, politics, and every other elegant and erudite study; but his great and favourite object was the theatre; for any

thing else he had neither leisure, nor curiosity, nor much esteem. He spoke, even on subjects he well understood, diffidently, and to know the great CORNEILLE he must be read.

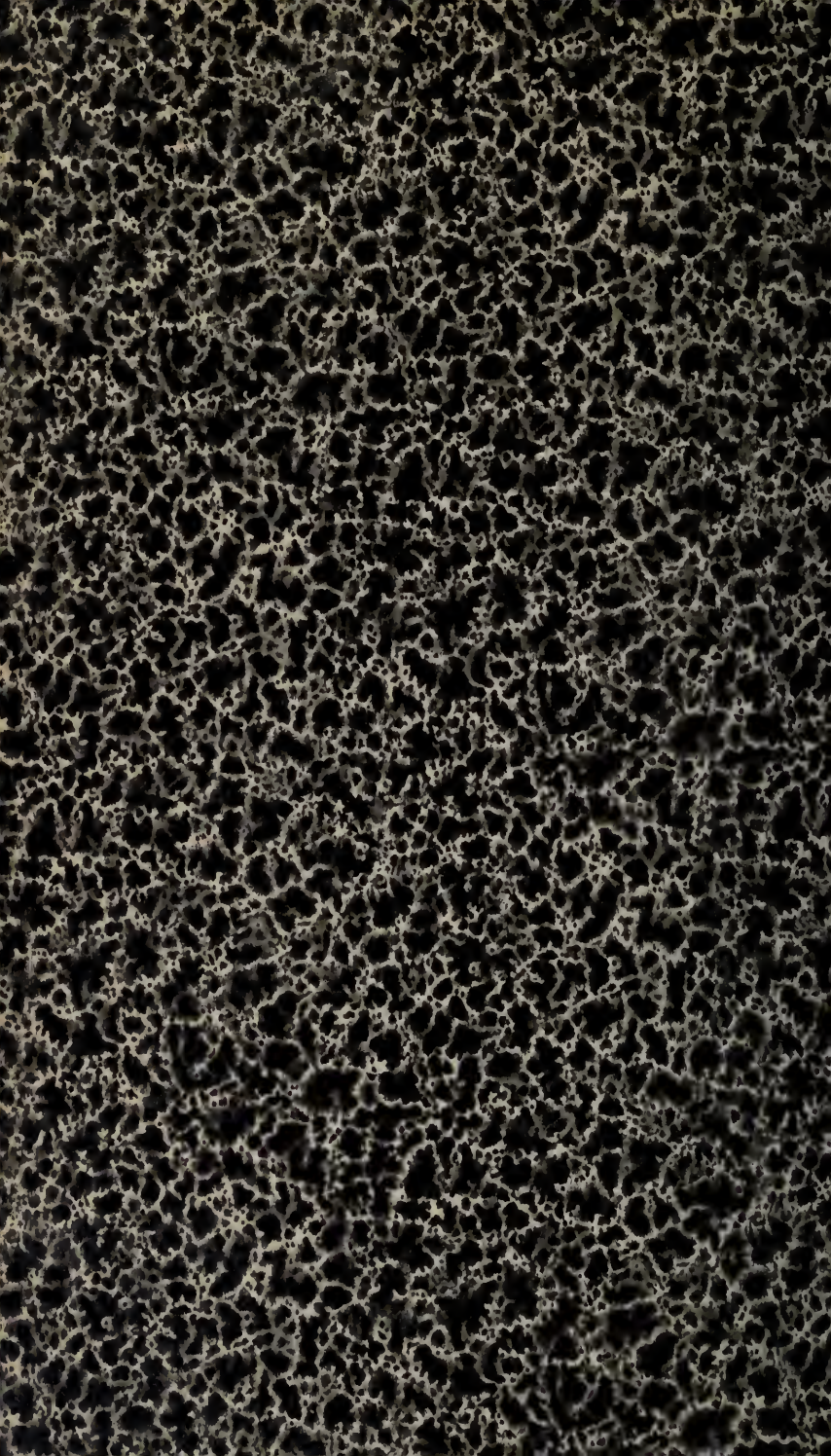
He was grave, but never sour; his humour was plain, but never rude; he was a kind husband, a fond parent and a faithful friend. His temperament inclined him to love, but never to libertism. He had a firm and independent mind, without suppleness, but was little calculated to make a fortune at a French court*, whose manners he despised. He was sensible of praise, but he detested flattery; diffident of his own merit, and forward to encourage the merit of others. To great natural probity, he joined a fervid but not a bigotted love of religion; and, indeed, such was his public talents, and his private virtues, that it is difficult to say which was predominant in this truly great and justly celebrated character, the man, or the writer.

* It is very material to add here; that though CORNEILLE, by the cabals of RICHELIEU, was kept out of the French academy till after that minister's death, yet the whole world have allowed him to have been a brilliant ornament of that society, and he was at its head when he died. It will be but justice hereafter to insert the elegant eulogium of RACINE on this great man, when his brother, T. CORNEILLE, was admitted into the academy as his successor.









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